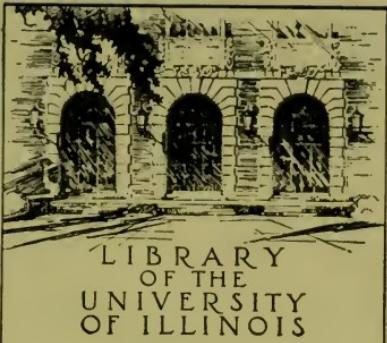


THE HERIOTS

SIR HENRY CUNNINGHAM.



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THE HERIOTS



THE HERIOTS

BY

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'CHRONICLES OF DUSTYPORE,' 'WHEAT AND TARES,' 'THE CERULEANS,'
ETC.

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MARSHALL

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TO

E. C. E.

'When all is done, human life is, at the greatest and the best, but like a froward child, that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet, till it falls asleep, and then the care is over.'

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
1. AN OLD HOME		I
2. OLIVIA		18
3. A HORRID ORDEAL		32
4. DEEPER AND DEEPER STILL		41
5. 'ICH HABE MEINE JUGEND VERLOREN'		53
6. A GREEN OLD AGE		68
7. GLORIOUS APOLLO		81
8. SIC ITUR AD ASTRA		94
9. DIPLOMACY		III
10. LE FOU QUI CROIT AU LENDEMAIN		127
11. LADY HERIOT PREPARES FOR ACTION		144
12. AN OLD LADY'S SERMON		163
13. A YOUNG MAN'S SPORT		175
14. RETRO SATHANAS!		188
15. 'A NEW MISTRESS NOW I CHASE'		197

CHAPTER I

AN OLD HOME

‘Happy is your grace,
That can translate the stubbornness of Fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style.’

HUNTSHAM COURT was one of those delightful old homes which transform the dull prose of country life into an idyll dear to the Englishman’s heart. It was idyllic, at any rate, to the Heriots, several generations of whom had first seen the light of day and had taken their last look at it beneath that friendly roof. To them it was a shrine of precious relics and dear associations. Its very shabbiness breathed a poetry that seemed to scorn the vulgar necessities of material repair. Its

gables peeping through the elms, its weather-stained walls, its rambling passages—whose geography one almost needed to be born a Heriot to understand—its galleries stored with many a trophy of travel and endless collections of faded books, its great bedrooms, where each generation of dwellers seemed to have left some stamp of personality—picture or print, historic bed or anecdotic chair—how tight a hold do such things take on loving hearts, whose love began with the first wondering looks of infancy! Outside, the great stretches of lawn, smooth with the care of centuries—the quaint stateliness of the gardens—the wide-spreading beeches that crowned the hillsides of the park—the moss-grown paths through depths of wood—each seemed to tell its own romance—a romance none the less charming for being often told—which made it natural for the Heriots to hold, foremost in their family creed, the loyal dogma that, for

them at any rate, there was and could be no place like home.

To Sir Adrian, the present Lord of Hunts-ham, his estate was suggestive of thoughts other than romantic—thoughts harassing, sordid, soul-depressing. It meant fields of stiff clay where nothing but wheat could be grown, and wheat only at a loss ; farms unlet or let only at a calamitous decline from their former rental ; mortgages whose interest was an incessant drag, and whose capital had to be found at inconvenient moments—charges which, unluckily, did not diminish with the means of defraying them—dilapidations which it was costly to remedy and ruinous to neglect—a banker's book which too often revealed that most disagreeable of all reading, an over-drawn account. Sir Adrian was excessively embarrassed, and his struggles to escape from embarrassment—which had mostly taken the form of injudiciously speculative projects—had only sunk him deeper in distress. Such

struggles involve sad wear and tear of brain, nerve and temper. Sir Adrian was often-times in the depths of low spirits—depths whose profundity defied the gentle ministrations of his wife, herself too oppressed by the burthen of existence to be an efficient consoler; or the ignorant light-heartedness of his son Jack, whom the experiences of Eton and Christchurch had not yet taught how rough a place the world may easily become to those who essay to travel through it without the necessary appliances for a comfortable journey.

Just now Sir Adrian had forgotten his troubles, for he was a good host, and there was a pleasant party in the house. It was the party of the year. His mother was paying them her accustomed autumn visit—an event which stirred the quiet current of Huntsham existence with a pleasurable excitement, not without its anxiety to the mistress of the house. Lady Heriot was a

vigorous old lady, excessively interested in the world, and requiring above everything to be well amused. Lady Eugenia was incapable of amusing any one, least of all her mother-in-law, of whose keen wit and outspoken criticisms she felt a somewhat paralysing dread. She protected herself by securing a sufficiency of guests to whom Lady Heriot would care to listen and to talk. Several of her husband's relatives were always to be depended upon for these occasions. Mrs. Hazelden, Sir Adrian's eldest sister—a woman, as her mother used to say, of strong sense, strong feelings, and strong language—would have thought herself dreadfully disloyal if she had failed to spend a week at the home of her girlhood during her mother's visit. She brought a considerable supply of pungent observations, some excellent stories, and a sturdy humour, to which the rough business of life and her cares as a mother of a family had but given additional zest. Valentine, a

younger brother, a prosperous man of business, and his smart young wife, generally contrived to take Huntsham at the outset of a course of autumn visits, and to fit their arrival at Huntsham with Lady Heriot's. Their presence, if in some ways distasteful to Lady Eugenia, was on these occasions, she felt, the greatest possible help. They relieved her of all anxiety as to Lady Heriot's being well entertained. The old lady liked these gay people, with their shrewdness, their quickness, their knowledge of the world, their bright talk, their sensible, if not always very elevated, way of looking at things, better than those who took her more seriously, and whose respectful demeanour was a sort of covert sermon on the dignities and responsibilities of old age, and a tacit reminder of its approaching end.

‘We old people,’ she used to say, ‘want cheering, and, above everything, not to be preached at. Some people cannot help

preaching.' Sir Adrian and Lady Eugenia had sometimes—Lady Heriot was constrained to admit to herself—the effect of a dull sermon. She resented such sermons the more because Sir Adrian laboured under the disadvantage of recalling to her recollection some of the things in life which had vexed her most, some incidents of which she least wished to be reminded. Thanks to him, she had been betrayed into several colossal blunders, and thrown away many thousands of pounds which, though legally at her disposal, she was bound, as an intelligent and capable guardian, to hand down intact to her children. She was shrewd, she had the reputation of shrewdness, and enjoyed it; but she felt that here at least she had sunk below the level of ordinary common sense, and that Sir Adrian was a sharer in the lapse, if not its instigator.

It was a relief to be able to turn from such topics to people who, like the Valentines, wore an air of prosperity and suggested only the

successful side of life. Viewed in this light, Mrs. Valentine's fine dresses, whose splendour and variety it was the family custom to condemn as out of taste, became but the fitting environment of a woman who marched through life in a sort of triumphal procession, conquering its difficulties, seizing its opportunities, and drinking its cup of pleasure to the dregs.

The family party was supplemented by a few outsiders, old friends of Sir Adrian and his mother, and traditional visitors at Huntsham. Dr. Crucible, the curator of a Government museum, had always for years past begun his summer holiday at Huntsham, and enjoyed no part of it so well. It was his recognised function to keep Lady Heriot supplied with new books and fresh gossip, and to add a spice to the talk around her tea-table by acid drops of sarcasm, and apophthegms, whose burthen was, for the most part, the surpassing folly of the human race.

Another invariable guest was Hillyard, a

neighbouring clergyman, an old college friend of Sir Adrian, and a devoted admirer of his mother. He had come now with his daughter Olivia, a picturesque young creature who wore the graces of ‘sweet seventeen’ with good effect. Her bright eyes, vivacious manner, and enthusiastic enjoyment of all things enjoyable had long ago secured her a place in Lady Heriot’s regard. She was the incarnation of youth, health, and gaiety, yet not unsympathetically boisterous, as youth is apt to seem to aged nerves. The two stood at the opposite poles of life, but, despite the long interval of years, Lady Heriot found her a congenial companion, and made active advances for the young lady’s goodwill. It was one of her principles that old age should treat young people with ceremonious politeness; but to Olivia she was more than polite.

‘Will you give me your arm, my dear,’ she had said to her as, on the opening morning of this tale, the breakfast party

broke up, and Olivia was helping her to rise from her seat, ‘and come with me for my walk in the garden? And, perhaps, afterwards you will have the kindness to read me the *Times*—a luxury my old eyes forbid me to enjoy, except through the kind offices of my friends.’

Olivia blushed up with pleasure, and her kindling eyes, as they caught her father’s, told how welcome the proposal was. The old lady and the young girl went off together in mutual satisfaction. This was the sort of thing that Olivia did to perfection. There was a nice combination of deference and kindness in her behaviour, which Lady Heriot found greatly to her taste.

She felt the pathos of age and its picturesqueness. She liked old people, she enjoyed ministering to them, and her grace and adroitness, her good-natured alacrity, made her a pleasant ministrant. She was now delighted to minister to Lady Heriot.

The two wandered, arm in arm, down the wide terrace, and by the avenue of limes, and passed the gate of the enclosure where —surrounded by old brick walls, now crumbling and moss-grown—was all that remained of the glory of a well-kept garden. Nature, however, had taken it to her kindly keeping, and shrouded the shortcomings of art and the negligence of man with a luxurious growth.

Olivia stood gazing, her eyes bright with pleasure, and drank a long draught of the fragrant atmosphere.

‘What an enchanting morning,’ she cried, ‘and how these gardens charm one—so still and peaceful—and these dear old-fashioned flowers, how gay they look, how delicious they smell !’

‘Do you know,’ said Lady Heriot, ‘a nice saying of a very wise person who wrote about gardens? “The breath of flowers,” he said, “is sweetest in the air, where it

comes and goes, like the warbling of music.''

'How pretty!' said Olivia; 'it is a sort of music, is it not? a harmony of pleasant sensations! Places like this garden do one good to remember, do they not?'

'I have many remembrances about it,' said her companion. 'This was my home, you know, for thirty years. That clump of beeches my dear husband and I planted when we were young people—I was a year or two older than you are now—in honour of our honeymoon; so they are old friends of mine, and nod me a kindly welcome whenever I come to see them.'

Lady Heriot stood gazing, her eyes dim with tears, and seemed lost in reverie. 'I have spent many a happy hour here,' she continued, 'many peaceful days. This was our favourite haunt. Sweet recollections, my child, grow very precious as other treasures slip from one. Young people

should make a good hoard of them betimes. “The thought of our past years in me doth breed Perpetual benediction”—the best blessing that old age can have.’

Olivia was charmed. ‘I shall always remember this walk with you, Lady Heriot,’ she said; ‘let me come with you again. It does me good. I wish to begin my store of good remembrances at once.’

So Lady Heriot and Olivia became the best of friends.

There was another person at Huntsham who was beginning to think Olivia delightful. She was a child, and Jack none the less a boy because he had been to Christchurch. No break had ever occurred to chill the pleasant familiarity of childhood. The past was dear to them in common. Recollection painted some happy scenes when, as little children, they had wandered together about the lanes in an ecstasy of surprise at the treasures which were for ever springing up

around them—flowers such as no longer live in the grown-up world; long summer afternoons under the elms, the air sweet with the scent of hay; delightful marauding expeditions along odorous hedgerows ablaze with primroses; wild adventures into the interminable depths of a park plantation. So childhood's remembered joys gave to each a romantic background which threw a tender radiance on the commonplace intimacy of grown-up life.

And now a new pulse stirring in Jack's blood told him that he was a child no longer, and that his companion was enchanting.

Before many days were passed, Jack began to talk about Olivia with a vehemence that aroused his mother's vague anxiety to active alarm.

‘Yes,’ Lady Eugenia had said with artless hypocrisy, ‘I suppose she would be called a pretty girl; but she is a mere child, and you

never can know how children will turn out ; she is perfectly unformed.'

'Unformed, mother !' cried the enthusiastic Jack. 'What can you mean by that ? How would you have her formed ? How many women in England are formed half as well ? Is she not like a Sir Joshua Reynolds stepping out of its frame—a dream of grace and refinement, only with colours ten times more enchanting than any Sir Joshua ?'

'How can you talk in that way, Jack ?' said his mother ; 'the girl is well enough, and it is fortunate that she seems to be intelligent ; she will probably have to earn her living as a governess.'

'A governess !' cried Jack, his excited mood all the hotter for his mother's coolness ; 'a governess ! a goddess ! I could tell you of plenty of scholars who would like to learn of such a governess as that ! All the world will be fighting for her, you will see.'

'Fighting for her !' cried Lady Eugenia ;

'that is not what generally happens when young governesses—pretty or ugly—are in want of a situation. Happily there is no need to think about it at present.'

Be Olivia's prospects what they might, there was nothing to prevent the two young people enjoying themselves meantime to their hearts' content. Jack had just passed his last Oxford examination—an effort of intellect which justified the pleasant idleness of a long vacation. Amid many abortive attempts at assiduity, he was diligent at one thing—his violin. The presence of Olivia—ready to play his accompaniments—gave a great stimulus to diligence. What pleasanter pretence at an industrious morning than to practise duets with so opportune a companion? Nothing more promotes the flow of talk than an employment which justifies silence but admits readily of interruption. Jack and Olivia, it may be surmised, stopped frequently in their labours to exchange ideas

or to indulge in a little permissible self-applause at the success of the performance.

Olivia, with her fingers resting on the notes like a modern St. Cecilia in flesh and blood—Jack kneeling on the ottoman, bow in hand, forgetful of everything but his delightful companion—how pleasantly, how swiftly such mornings slip away !

CHAPTER II

OLIVIA

'For she was faire, as faire might ever be,
And in the flower of her freshest age ;
Yet full of grace and goodly modestie,
That even Heaven rejoiced her sweete face to see.'

MRS. VALENTINE HERIOT's relations, the Goldinghams, lived at 'the Pines,' a fine place within an afternoon's drive of Hunts-ham. They were extremely rich. The founder of the family had realised a huge fortune from a stucco, of which he was the fortunate monopolist, and which had established its fame as by many degrees harder, more weather-tight, and more economical than any previously revealed to human ken. Mr. Goldingham, it was said, had spent half

a million in advertising, had bought up big competitors and crushed the small, and now held the markets of the world. Wealth, accordingly, was as abundant at the Pines as it was conspicuous by its absence at Huntsham.

Sir Adrian had always disliked his opulent neighbours. Their splendour—comfortable and solid—contrasted disagreeably with the shabby meagreness of all around him. Mr. Goldingham's model cottages, exquisite gardens, and well-appointed homesteads, bristling with every new appliance, were a reflection on the picturesque but ruinous tenements of the Huntsham cottagers. Sir Adrian consoled himself with the reflection that farming and cottage-building of this order was the natural amusement of a millionaire, who wanted to make his wealth conspicuous, and that such showy extravagance could never pay.

Mr. Goldingham, however, soon proved

that his farms paid as well as other people's, and carried public opinion with him in protesting that it was neither humane nor economical to house one's labourers like pigs. Meanwhile he went his way rejoicing, with other and more solid grounds of satisfaction. He had carried an election, as Liberal member for the county. Sir Adrian, who, as his father before him, had represented it, and was by sentiment and tradition a Tory of the purest water, had fought angrily for his endangered seat. Mr. Goldingham had triumphed ; the contest had left a great deal of bitterness behind it and a smarting sense of defeat in Sir Adrian's mind, already full enough of the material of ferment.

One good result, however, of the millionaire's settlement in the county was that Mr. Hillyard, who, as Mrs. Goldingham's first cousin, had the needy kinsman's claim upon his wealthy relations, was, through her influence, presented with the incumbency of

a small Rectory which lay between the two estates. He thus became available for social purposes at Huntsham, and was a great addition to Sir Adrian's comfort in life. The one was as impecunious as the other, and each was glad of a companion in whose society money troubles might be forgotten awhile in more congenial topics. Hillyard was, admittedly, a very clever fellow, but his cleverness was not exactly of the order most calculated to advance his interests as a Churchman. Mr. Goldingham had given him the living with the idea of putting a stop to the scandals to which Hillyard's embarrassments were too often giving rise. But Hillyard had no sooner got a living than he considered himself entitled to marry; and did not improve his condition by marrying a beautiful young Irishwoman with no fortune but a pair of melting violet eyes, lips round which the Graces played, and a low deep voice, which, with its little touch of Irish

brogue, sounded with a sweet pathos to her husband's inner ear long after he had heard it for the last time on earth.

Mrs. Hillyard proved the worst of all possible managers. The financial crisis at the Rectory became yearly more acute. Butchers and bakers did not find in the bride's *beaux yeux* sufficient compensation for long unsettled accounts for quartern loaves and solid legs of mutton. The life of the young couple was embittered by unskilful attempts to make an inadequate income stretch over an expenditure that, for some recondite reason or other, seemed ever on the rise. Then came a baby, the Olivia of the present story, the most bewitching little creature that it was possible to imagine, but still not tending to reduce expenses. Hillyard made bootless attempts to discover new sources of supply. He wrote spasmodic articles for magazines, which, though learned and scholar-like, did not prove to be par-

ticularly saleable. Then the brilliant idea of taking pupils suggested itself, but resulted in nothing but much fruitless expenditure.

Then, to crown their misfortunes, Mrs. Hillyard's health broke down. Nothing but a winter in Italy, change of scene, a warm climate, and rest—perfect rest of mind and body, the doctor said—could save her. Rest! Italy! Good God! Hillyard was already deep in debt to half the neighbouring tradesmen, and at a loss where to turn for a sovereign! Half frantic, he rushed off to his bankers and persuaded them to lend him £200. He sent his darling off to Mentone with Olivia for companion, and remained, eating his heart out, at the lonely Rectory, half starving himself meanwhile. Mrs. Hillyard came back to her home in the spring with death written in her haggard features, bright eyes, and hectic cheek. Husband and wife read directly in each other's eyes what was going to happen. She was doomed—

and before autumn the doom had fallen. Hillyard was a widower, and Olivia motherless.

Olivia was a precocious child, and her mother's death hurried her into womanhood. The true woman's natural function is that of consolation, and Olivia was a thorough woman. She had always cherished a romantic attachment to her father, and she now felt an overpowering flow of pitying love for the heart-broken, helpless man, more unable than ever to face the rough struggle of existence. Hillyard, on his part, felt all the chivalry and tenderness of his nature stirred into active life by the charming creature who was now dependent on him for everything, and whose future was so dark. He petted her with a kind solicitude that went to Olivia's heart. She had her mother's eyes, more than her mother's beauty, and a vivacity of wit which was all her own and made her father often declare her to be the best company in the

world. But Olivia had more than a lively wit; she was instinctively mistress, as her father soon discovered, of the art of fascination.

She was, he soon began to realise, devoting herself to charming him, and found the task easy and congenial. Her father, whatever else the poverty of her home denied, could give her an education as refined, as polished as the best. An education that did not include the classics was, to Hillyard's understanding, but an empty and meaningless fragment—enough, perhaps, to give a surface glitter, but leaving the soul uncultured, the taste with no adequate standard—the most interesting chapters of human history a blank.

'All the best possible things,' so ran his doctrine, 'said in the best possible manner by the best possible people, Olivia. That is what the classics mean—all the moods of human thought when men had yet room and leisure to be original: "those fortunate early

risers of literature, who gathered their phrases with the dew still on them," and had their poetry ready-made for them in their vocabulary. Modern literature is but plagiarism, and the moderns are clumsy plagiarists. The cleverest, the brightest of them are content with the humble *rôle* of translators ; and rightly, for beauty is eternal.'

So Olivia's education progressed. She lived happy and serene in her own happy surroundings. Of the outer world she thought nothing and knew nothing, except that, when she went on rare occasions to the neighbouring market-town, the people in the streets turned to look at her, and that most of the gentlemen who came to her father's house on business or pleasure seemed suddenly inspired with a vivid interest in her fortunes and herself. She had never, it may be safely affirmed, formulated in her mind any definition of the characteristic qualities of man ; but it is probable that, without previous

definition, she was accustomed, even at this early period, to think of him as an appreciative and sympathetic animal.

In the meanwhile she wrote a set of Latin Alcaics on her father's birthday, which the admiring recipient walked about the drawing-room reciting with tears of pleasure in his eyes, and which he declared would have done credit to a sixth-form boy at Eton.

Jack's excited mood and high-flown praises made his mother anxious about him. Her anxiety soon assumed an acuter phase, for Jack's feelings on the subject had become too strong to bear either repression or concealment. His mother was the natural depositary of his confession.

One night Jack came into her bedroom for a chat and poured out his troubles. It at once became apparent that he was very far gone indeed.

' You must admit, mother,' he cried, ' she

is a lovely creature, and clever and good. Where is there another like her ?'

'There are plenty like her,' Lady Eugenia said in ineffectual protest ; 'believe me, Jack, the world is full of charming girls. Happily or unhappily, they are a plentiful race, only too plentiful !'

'Come, mother,' said Jack, 'don't say that. You know it is not true. Girls like Olivia are not so common. The world would be a much prettier place if they were. Confess now that you admire her as much as I do. Did you ever have any girl here that you liked half as well ?'

'She is a child, I tell you, Jack,' said his mother, 'and so are you—perfect children both. You must not think of marriage these dozen years, and when you do think of it you will have to find a girl with some money to help to keep you afloat.'

'I can never marry any one but Olivia,' Jack said solemnly ; 'show me the girl, mother,

that can compare with her in beauty or wit. Anyhow, I love her. I am not ambitious. I don't want to be a greater man than my father. We all despise wealth, don't we? As for marrying into stucco or that sort of thing, like Uncle Val, I hate the idea of it. Besides, don't you see, mother, it is no use talking to me. I love the very ground she treads on.'

Then Lady Eugenia thought it necessary to tell Sir Adrian, who accepted the intelligence as but one item more in the list of life's complications. He braced himself up to the effort of speaking to Jack on the subject.

'I have something serious to say to you, Jack,' he said; 'you are behaving like a fool, sir, and bothering your mother. What is all this nonsense about you and Olivia? You have said nothing to the girl, of course?'

'Not a word, sir,' said Jack, 'except——'

'Except what?' asked his father peremptorily.

'I can't tell what I may have said to her, father. I love her, and do not always count my words. I have not offered to marry her, if that is what you mean.'

'Good heavens, Jack!' cried his father in consternation, 'I should hope not indeed. Marry her! Why, my dear fellow, you have only just taken your degree! You are a student, a schoolboy, and she is a schoolgirl, without a grain of reason in either of your silly brains, or a penny to bless yourselves with! For goodness sake do not let any such foolish notion come into your head!'

Jack showed a great deal of the family obstinacy. Lady Eugenia experienced just the same feeling of hopelessness and fatigue as was familiar to her in contests with her husband.

'I want you to understand, Jack,' his father said, resuming the attack, 'how much discomfort and trouble you may easily produce. You must see that you cannot be

married for years to come. You will then have to make the match of a rational being—some woman whose position and money will help you to face the world and hold your own in it. It is no easy struggle, I can tell you. You have no idea, my boy, how bad the times are, how unfortunate I have been, what difficulty I have in making both ends meet. The fact is, they don't meet. Things have gone badly with me, Jack, cruelly badly. You must promise me not to make love to her——'

'Till when?' said Jack.

'Till I give you leave,' said his father decisively. 'Unless you give me your word of honour to that, I must send you with a tutor to Germany, or to India for a year's travelling. Will you promise?'

'I suppose I must,' said Jack.

CHAPTER III

A HORRID ORDEAL

‘I know not
What counts harsh fortune casts upon my face ;
But in my bosom shall she never come
To make my heart her vassal.’

SIR ADRIAN’s exercise of paternal despotism cost him all the more for the consideration that he had, as the facts stood between himself and Jack, no right to be despotic. It was Jack who was, if the truth were known, the real master of the situation. Sir Adrian had now before him something which he dreaded more than any of the inconveniences in which poverty had hitherto involved him ; something which, all along, had given poverty its worst sting. For years past it had been

looming in the horizon, darkening the afternoon lights of Sir Adrian's life. It was now close at hand ; it must be done, and done forthwith. Sir Adrian had to confess his troubles to his son. The confession cost a dreadful effort even in anticipation. It was a new order of affliction, all the more poignant for its novelty. Sir Adrian was by this time accustomed to many phases of embarrassment — to solicitors, to creditors, to his mother's views, to his wife's, to Valentine's. He had gone through the worst that they could inflict upon him. The worst was very bad, but it was endurable : he had borne it, he could bear it again. But with Jack he had always held his head high. He had maintained a dignified reserve. Jack knew that his father was poor ; he could not be at home without observing the signs of that ; but he knew no more. He had always had a handsome allowance. He had lived freely and gaily with his compeers. His college

debts had been paid. Poverty which allowed of this had naturally seemed to him not unendurable. The comfortable routine of a country house is suggestive of anything rather than impending change. It is the very antipodes of revolution; yet the changes which Sir Adrian now had in his thoughts were revolutionary.

He had a confession to make, a confession that would seem to Jack like the world tumbling about his ears—the overturning of all the solid facts of life; nor was the confession all. He had to ask him to place himself in a position which was not his legal one, to assume a responsibility for family debts which were not legally binding upon him, to overthrow the safe and solid structure of protection which a family settlement rears for the future landowner before his birth, and maintains for him all his life, unless with his own hand he pulls it down. Jack had to be informed that his father's

emergency demanded the cutting off of the entail. Supposing he refused? But Sir Adrian did not count on a refusal. Jack would, Sir Adrian well knew, behave like a gentleman and a good fellow in his father's hour of need, his own hour of self-sacrifice. None the less it was a dreadful disclosure, a dreadful proposal to have to make—all the more dreadful for Jack's unconsciousness of the impending disaster, and his undisguised affection for the place that was soon to pass away from him for ever.

'These are grand oaks, father,' he said one day, as the two were strolling through one of the woods that crowned the hillsides round Huntsham Park, 'are they not? I don't know where there are any finer in the county. Lord Appenthalpe's cannot compare with them.'

'Cannot they?' said his father in torture, for the oaks had long been doomed. Sir Adrian knew their cubic contents, and the

sum which they would contribute to his exhausted exchequer.

'And what an ornament they are to the place!' cried the unthinking Jack. 'What is any place without them? Just look at the Pines, with that horrid, gaudy house—as smart as paint and stucco can make it, and not a tree on the whole estate that is worth looking at. No gentleman would care to live there, would he?'

'But Mr. Goldingham is making fine plantations,' said his father, catching helplessly at a moment's delay of the crisis which he felt to be imminent; 'he has planted out half a million trees, Sincox was telling me yesterday. I envy him the job sincerely.'

'Three generations hence they will be respectable,' cried Master Jack, 'which is more than the house will ever be. It is a rich tradesman's house, father, is it not? too fine, too pretentious, too new; nothing really

nice about it. Just look at Huntsham! why, even as a ruin, it would tell its own tale, that gentlefolk have lived there for three hundred years.'

'Jack,' said his father suddenly, 'I have something to say to you—bad for you to hear—cruel for me to say. You are a man now, and must bear to hear it, though it breaks both our hearts and your mother's. I have been unfortunate, Jack, very unfortunate in money matters. I have done my best for you: but bad has been my best. I can do no more. I am at the end of expedients: God knows, I have tried every one that I could think of. But the times are hard and the luck has been against me. I was left with heavy mortgages, and heavy charges, too heavy for the estate. My own bad luck or bad judgment has done the rest. I am a ruined man, and you can guess what you are. I have concealed it from you as long as a ray of hope remained. It would

be cruelty—cowardice and cruelty—to conceal it any longer.'

Jack stood stunned; his usually ruddy cheek was white as a sheet. His good instincts showed themselves at once. He seized his father's hand; somehow he could not speak.

'You have been a good son to me, Jack, and I know that I may count on you; we must face it together.'

'Of course we must, and will,' said Jack; 'what is it, father, that I am to do?'

Then came the stern prosaic truth, and very grim and horrible it sounded. Jack was to join with his father in cutting off the entail. Huntsham must be sold.

'Sold!' cried Jack aghast; 'Huntsham sold! Surely that cannot be necessary. Can it legally be sold?'

'It can, and must,' said his father in desperation; 'I like the idea as little as you do, Jack, God knows. I have fought against

my money troubles till the last ditch. But I can fight no more. I am swamped. There are the mortgages—a big one of your grandfather's when he fought the election. It cost him forty thousand. Then there was a big slice cut off for your Uncle Valentine, and there is your grandmother's jointure, and your aunts' annuities, and two mortgages of my own. Meanwhile rents are falling and tenants giving notice. I have three farms on my hands. They are all driving me half mad, I can tell you.'

'All right, father,' cried Jack cheerfully ; 'do not fret about me. I shall do well enough. I will go and make a fortune somehow. Of course the Heriots must pay their debts, let it cost what it will. We must make my mother comfortable ; must not we ? That is the great thing.'

'You are a good fellow, Jack,' said his father, taking his hand ; 'a good son—an honourable man. You will be happier, all

your life, when you remember how you have behaved to-day. Here comes your mother. Don't let us talk about it before her.'

Then Lady Eugenia came up and took Sir Adrian's arm. Jack saw that which the careless eyes of youth had failed to see before—what a careworn and sorrow-stricken couple his parents had begun to look. His courage rose manfully to the task which life was setting him. His task was to guard these two gentle natures from the rough blows of the world—to protect, support, console them. He would do it. Dear, kind, simple, generous hearts! Who could deserve it more?

He took his mother's hand kindly, and held it as they strolled along beneath the trees.

Somehow Lady Eugenia felt as if the work of protection had there and then begun.

CHAPTER IV

DEEPER AND DEEPER STILL

' How goes the world that I am thus encountered
With clamorous demands of date-broke bonds,
And the detention of long-since-due debts
Against my honour ? '

SIR ADRIAN's heroic remedy had been invoked none too soon. Matters were going very badly at Huntsham. The long lane of adversity showed no symptom of turning, but grew ever deeper and more miry. The chariot wheels which bore the fortunes of the Heriots began to move heavily, and threatened to come to a standstill. Jack's generous surrender of his rights brought no immediate relief, for no purchaser for Huntsham, except on absolutely disastrous terms, could be

found. It was like his luck, Sir Adrian felt, that the moment at which he wished and was able to sell should be precisely that at which the chances of a reasonably profitable sale were hopelessly remote. Mr. Graves, the family solicitor, who was doing his utmost to find a purchaser, wrote in terms of discouragement. Country estates were, he said, a drug in the market. Too many proprietors were in the same predicament as Sir Adrian, and ready, like him, to submit to almost any sacrifice to obtain present relief.

Meanwhile bills poured in upon Sir Adrian in ever-swelling volume; rents and revenues trickled in dwindling rivulets or ceased to flow. Everybody, it seemed to him, who had anything to pay, abounded in unanswerable apologies for being behindhand, or plausible grounds for claiming abatement. One farm after another was surrendered, each in its turn swelling the total of Sir Adrian's deficit. One of his mortgages had

to be renewed, and Mr. Graves wrote that land was not thought as good security as it once was, and that a successor to the outgoing mortgagee was hard to find. At Huntsham itself the absence of ready money was becoming daily more apparent in dilapidated buildings, ill-tilled fields, and a general air of ruin. Things could not, it was certain, go on much longer as they were. Sir Adrian recognised that the hour of doom—the inevitable crash—must shortly come.

Before many weeks had passed, the hour did come with a vengeance. One of Sir Adrian's borrowings from the local Bank at Huntsford had been allowed to run on for years, till the necessity of repayment had faded from Sir Adrian's mind. All had gone on quietly and pleasantly. The interest was carried half-yearly to the debit of Sir Adrian's account. The Bank had no reason to complain. But the Board, through some recondite influence, had of late become

uneasy, and the Manager now wrote to say that the debt must be discharged at once. Sir Adrian had written back — in a form which was, unfortunately, too familiar to him — to say that immediate payment was utterly impossible, but that he was making arrangements, and would, at the earliest possible date, provide for the liability. No answer had come, and Sir Adrian had fondly hoped that the holder was appeased. In the next few weeks this agreeable delusion was rudely swept away by lawyers' letters, notices, summons, — proceedings which only made Sir Adrian more obstinate than before in refusing to give this importunate and impertinent creditor an advantage over the rest ; and then, almost before Sir Adrian had realised the gravity of the occasion, the news arrived that the case had been taken into Court and judgment had been recovered. Still Sir Adrian stood firm. What was to happen next ?

Two dingy individuals, of a Jewish aspect, called one morning at Huntsham, and asked to see Sir Adrian on business. Morrison, the butler, who had grown white-headed in Sir Adrian's employ and his father's, interviewed the visitors, and did not like their looks at all. What sort of business was it, he asked, on which they had come? That was a question which the two visitors preferred to answer only to Sir Adrian. Thereupon Morrison instructed a footman to keep a sharp look-out on the intruders' proceedings, while he went to inform his master. The visitors sent in a note which speedily gained them admission to Sir Adrian's study; and there their awful mission was revealed. Not only had judgment been recovered, but a writ of execution had issued, under which the myrmidons of the law had laid a grisly hand on Huntsham and its contents.

They had no wish to be disagreeable, they had no desire to obtrude; but remain

they must. They were in possession. It was Sir Adrian and Lady Eugenia who were the intruders.

Then Morrison was summoned to his master's presence and entrusted with the secret, and with the task of arranging matters so as to conceal the disaster from the outer world. The pair of Jewish gentlemen were spirited away, to be decently concealed from view and provided with the means of solid enjoyment in the back regions. They seemed entirely accustomed to Sir Adrian's explanation that there had been a mistake and that all would be speedily set right. Meanwhile they were masters of the position.

To crown the disaster several of the Huntsham tradespeople, catching a rumour of the Bank's proceedings, made rude and peremptory demands; and when these were disregarded, carried their cases into the County Court, and having obtained decrees,

sent their representatives to join those of the Bank already quartered at Hunts-ham.

Sir Adrian sat alone in his study. Ruin, too close to be any longer trifled with, stared him in the face. The evil was not greater than he had known it, all along, to be ; but it was closer to him. The hour for temporising had passed. He wrote off in desperation to Mr. Graves, to his mother, to Valentine. It was unfortunate for Sir Adrian that his application to Lady Heriot was especially ill-timed. She was feeling ill, disinclined and unfit for business. She was pinched for money. A call from one of Adrian's companies had swept off her spare cash : her usually handsome balance at her banker's had sunk below the point which Lady Heriot thought safe or respectable. She wrote off to Mr. Graves, who had already got Sir Adrian's letter, and who came to her on the instant, looking, as indeed

Lady Heriot felt, as if something dreadful had occurred.

'This is a bad business,' he said ; 'it must be stopped at once.'

'It is all very well to say it must be stopped,' Lady Heriot said, by this time thoroughly upset by vexation and alarm, 'but what am I to do? I am really most unfortunate.'

'I see no difficulty, so far,' said Mr. Graves ; 'deplorable as the matter is as showing Sir Adrian's capacity for mismanagement, and the straits to which it has reduced him. But the sum is inconsiderable—£1200, I believe.'

'But it is not at all inconsiderable to me, Mr. Graves,' Lady Heriot said with asperity ; 'you don't know how Sir Adrian has bled me —bled me. I am impoverished.'

'He has been very unfortunate,' observed the lawyer.

'And very blundering,' said Lady Heriot.

'But his blunders,' pleaded Mr. Graves, 'would not have mattered if it had not been for his misfortunes, and his misfortunes would have swamped him, blunders or no.'

'Well,' said Lady Heriot, 'there is no use in our discussing that. Blunders or misfortunes, Adrian is once again down on his back in the mud, and I suppose I must pay for him.'

'I think so,' said Mr. Graves, 'and the sooner the better. Mortimers, I see, are the plaintiff's attorneys. I had better send and tell them that the matter will be settled, and that the bailiff's people may be withdrawn.'

'And how am I to do it?' said Lady Heriot.

'You have not enough then at your banker's, Lady Heriot?' asked Mr. Graves.

'No,' said Lady Heriot, 'certainly not. I am much too poor to keep such a balance.'

'Then,' said Mr. Graves, 'we must

realise some of your securities—some of those that you can deal with. After all, it is only giving it to Sir Adrian now instead of hereafter.'

'I am beginning to doubt,' said Lady Heriot, sinking from one depth of despondency to another, 'whether I ought to give it to him at all. The whole affair is deplorable—deplorable and disgraceful. You must write to Sir Adrian, Mr. Graves; I cannot, and will not. Tell him I am very much inconvenienced and very much displeased.'

'Let me suggest,' said Graves, 'if I am not venturing too far, Lady Heriot, that you should write to him yourself. Sir Adrian is a sensitive man. He is suffering, no doubt. He will be dreadfully hurt at your reply coming through me.'

'I shall only make matters worse,' said the other, 'by writing angrily, as I know I should; and I really have not strength to write at all. Mr. Graves, you must arrange it, and send

me the papers to sign. Another trouble of this sort would kill me.'

Mr. Graves went away with a heavy heart and a new foreboding. He was devoted to the Heriots. He cared sincerely for Sir Adrian. He had known him since he was a boy. He knew his troubles and his fruitless efforts to escape them. He had often helped in the escape. He had drawn Lady Heriot's will. For years past he had thought of it as the natural means by which Sir Adrian's crippled fortunes would, one day, be restored. The capital, of which she had the life interest, with a right of apportionment amongst her children, would suffice to set Adrian free from his creditors. Supposing that now—at the last—anything should intervene to hinder that much-to-be-desired restoration! Mr. Graves was a calm person, by temperament, by habit; but he could not think of this contingency with calmness. It would be the subversion of the rightful order of events, which it is the

function of family solicitors to preserve, to bring about. The world, however, was, Mr. Graves's experience told him, a place where, despite all efforts to prevent them, such subversions not unfrequently occurred.

CHAPTER V

‘ICH HABE MEINE JUGEND VERLOREN’.

‘As the most forward bud
Is eaten by the canker ere it blow ;
E’en so by love the young and tender wit
Is turned to folly ; blasting in the bud,
Losing his wisdom, even in the prime,
And all the fair effects of future hopes.’

OLIVIA returned to her home an altered being. A new conviction had been borne in upon her—that life abounds in enchanting possibilities. This conviction was a disturbing one. It jarred on the thoughtless, effortless bliss of childhood, and, jarring, it destroyed it. Olivia’s horizon was suddenly enlarged. The childish cares, interests, and joys which, till now, had rounded her little life, were suddenly pushed aside by a superior force.

Till now the surroundings of existence had been amply sufficient for her. Poor as they were, and serious as was the insistence with which occasionally poverty knocked at their door, her father and she lived a life which till now had satisfied her every aspiration. When Hillyard could forget his loss for a while he was as light-hearted as a schoolboy. When a melancholy mood beset him he was gentle, considerate, watchful against obtruding his sorrow on a companion whom youth rendered more buoyant than himself under the stroke of bereavement. When he was in the scholar's mood, he poured out a medley of learned gossip—favourite flowers of study culled for Olivia's express benefit—trifles, which told her, however, how much that was not trifling there was behind, in the well-furnished treasure-house of her father's brain.

'We must be philosophers, Olivia,' he would say, 'since experience, in the shape of unpaid Christmas bills, insists on teaching

us philosophy. This leg of mutton, with whose diminishing outlines we have grown so familiar, even as they vanished, has, after all, given us several excellent repasts. Were it only paid for, I would wish for nothing better. This lettuce, fresh culled by my Olivia's hand, how crisp and dewy! These pickles—we are unfortunately but too near the bottom of the bottle—how rare a condiment! "Plain living and high thinking"—the healthiest regimen for mortals!

"Peace and Quiet,
Spare Fast that oft with gods doth diet."

A one-o'clock repast leaves the brain admirably clear for an intellectual banquet in the evening. Whom the gods love dine early, Olivia, as some philosopher has observed. A banquet of bread and butter (in limited amounts) purges the intellect of its earthly grossness, sets the soul loose to soar, unimpeded, into the empyrean. We dine here in the midst of our books, surrounded

by the great and good—the wise, the witty, the profound; our fare is humble but our guests are illustrious. Meanwhile my Olivia grows a young nymph on humble fare, like Daniel on the pulse—

“ Herbs and other country messes
Which the neat-handed Phillis dresses.”

Phillis, by the way, is rudely importunate for her last quarter's wages. Base mercenary girl!

So Olivia and her father had scrambled through life in a not unenjoyable fashion.

Every commonplace incident caught a gleam of poetry from their romantic relations, and the grace which each brought to the humble duties of existence. Olivia was perfectly content.

And now this pleasant peaceful epoch had closed. Olivia had left childhood and childhood's happiness behind her. She realised now—what had never occurred to her before—that life meant something more than happy companionship with her father and the filial

duties which she rendered to him; something profounder, more soul-stirring, more satisfying. The occupations which she had formerly found so interesting, so engrossing, were no longer enough. There was a something at work in her which she could not reckon with, could not analyse, could not dominate. She tried, and tried in vain to believe that she did not miss her companion. She set herself heroically to make the best of such materials of cheerfulness as existence still afforded. But she was conscious of a restlessness that would not be allayed, a want which not all her father's tenderness could satisfy, a void which not all her studies would suffice to fill. She would indignantly have repudiated the suggestion that she was unhappy. Nor was she; but her happiness was not of the calm unconscious order which had reigned in her soul before her last experiences at Huntsham. That too agreeable companionship had struck a new fever

into her blood. Her childhood had ended. She was a woman.

Thus Olivia was beginning to look about her as a young bird peeps at the world over the edges of its nest. The prospect was not quite reassuring. Many things filled her with apprehension. It was tacitly agreed between father and daughter that money matters should be mentioned as seldom as possible, and discussed only up to the point at which discussion was compatible with cheerfulness. Poor people, who wish for any comfort in life, are driven to such expedients. But the relief is temporary. Olivia became increasingly conscious that you do not dispose of the troubles of life by ignoring them. She could not blind herself to the fact that her father's slender income, such as it was, alone stood between them and penury, and that this protection must at no distant day come to an end. Her kinsfolk were few, and not to be relied on for sub-

stantial help. The Goldinghams considered that all claims had been satisfied by the gift of the living, and discouraged an intimacy suggestive of inconvenient demands. Nor was Hillyard in the least disposed for intimacy. 'Dives equum,' he had said with some scorn to Olivia, as one of the smart Goldingham carriages was wafting them to the station on the return from their last visit — 'dives pictai vestis et auri—but Dives is a vulgar fellow, Olivia, and Mrs. Dives, she is a vulgar fellow too, and a dull one; and on the whole I am not sorry that that is over.'

'Nor am I, father,' said Olivia, taking his hand fondly, 'there is no place like home, especially no place like *my* home. I dislike stucco particularly.'

Nor were Olivia's humbler relations more congenial. There was a certain Dr. Meredith, her mother's brother, who was practising as a physician, with not too much success, in a provincial town. He came at rare inter-

vals to see her father and herself, a dull, harassed man, weary with an uphill professional trudge, and a troop of children whose education was a never-ending struggle against opposing forces. Olivia had always reflected with a pang that these people were her nearest relations. She had a dreadful remembrance of a visit which she and her father had once paid to them at Axborough —the grimy city with its hideous chimneys shrouded in a sulphurous pall of smoke ; the crowded streets, the rough, bustling crowd, the vulgar shops ; the business-like gravity of her uncle's house and its inmates ; the ill-kept, unlovely children who assembled with distracting punctuality at meal-times and were constantly surprising one by their inconvenient numbers. The scene had filled Olivia's soul with horror. She was soon longing to get back to her quiet, picturesque home, where trees and flowers and sweet sylvan vistas gave to life, however humble,

a poetry of its own. As they travelled back her father told her of overtures on her uncle's part with a view to securing her services for her cousins' education. They had both put away the idea as a horrid suggestion, which it was a comfort to know did not come within the range of possibility. It had remained in Olivia's thoughts, however, as a specimen of the sort of things which might hereafter present themselves for endurance. She had often reminded herself that she might some day have to become a governess or a companion. That thought had at one time possessed no terrors for her. Why should she not, as well as any of the thousand other girls who have a livelihood to earn? She was well equipped, and the world is full of happy chances. Adventure into the unknown has always something pleasant to the courageous soul. But now, as it drew near and ceased to be vague, this possibility looked less attractive. It seemed to Olivia

sometimes to be drawing very near indeed. Her father's health was certainly not as strong as she remembered it. He was growing an old man, and his old age was not robust. He was always cheerful, but it was not the cheerfulness of a sound physique. Olivia began to understand that some of his failings—his irresolution, for instance, his infirmity of purpose, his delays, his forgetfulness—might be owing to bodily weakness against which he struggled in vain. This idea filled her with a tender pity; but then pity is not an exhilarating sentiment. So everything that Olivia thought about just now began to take a sombre hue. The world was, she was beginning to feel, a very sad place.

At the bottom of her thoughts lay a spring of sadness—silent, secret, but none the less active—like some busy little fount, which goes welling and streaming on busily through the still night, saturating all the

place around. There was, Olivia knew, a tender spot in her heart, which shrank from touching even by herself. There was a dear friend, who was different from other friends, the very thought of whom set her heart beating. Yet it was a sad sort of sentiment, a ghost of friendship, for he had passed away. She and Jack Heriot were friends, fast friends, but they could never, Olivia well understood, be anything more. He must go out into the world to seek his fortune, as poor as any young fortune-hunter could be, and with no prospect but poverty. He had cut off the entail to save his father's honour, but in doing so he had doomed himself to poverty, had abandoned the chance of happiness in life. He was now, thanks to his own generous act, extremely poor. Some men go forth with nothing in their pockets, and soon find the way to wealth. But Jack! No, Olivia felt that it was in vain to hope. He might force his way to glory, but to

riches, never! It would be enough for him to do to keep afloat in the great bustling turgid stream. He could never marry—never at least till after a lapse of years and a string of vicissitudes, which, at Olivia's time of life, seem absolutely interminable. He had accepted his fate and was gone. Olivia too had accepted hers. Lady Eugenia, with all her kindness, had conveyed sundry skilful but emphatic hints that her welcome at Huntsham depended on a tacit understanding, and would cease at once if ever that tacit understanding were infringed, or even imperilled. There must be no nonsense between her and Jack. It was playing with fire. They never could marry; such a marriage would mean disaster to them both; it was wiser not to haunt the pleasant paths by which marriage is approached. The human heart turns sadly from visions of possible delight. It was but a day-dream, but the surrender, even of a day-dream, costs

a pang. Olivia, like Jack, was conscious of a sort of martyrdom ; she was the victim of cruel circumstances ; she was hedged in by stern necessity. Life indeed had much for her ; she was happy as she was ; but there was a more delightful form of happiness, which hovered in the background, merely as a regret. There was a region of fancy—a pleasant region—from which stern fate commanded her to turn away. Olivia's saddened mood infected her father. He found her more touching, more tender, more charming than ever. The subtle infusion of melancholy added a new pathos to her devotion, to the gaiety under which devotion hid itself. Still Hillyard grew uneasy, and it was a great relief when one day a letter arrived from Lady Heriot, inviting Olivia to come and pay her a visit in London. 'It is a most selfish request,' Lady Heriot wrote, 'for you know, my dear, what an invalid I am, and how little fit a companion for so

bright and young a creature as yourself. I must tell you the truth—I am in a fit of low spirits. I have been in more pain than usual, and that by itself is no small tax on one's equanimity, and I am sleeping badly. I am too ailing to enjoy my friends, and I find myself bad company. I want some one who is everything that I am not—young, healthy, happy, gay—to lighten up my sombre drawing-room and my silent house. My servants, I can see, are getting quite depressed. Now I have made a clean breast of it, my dear Olivia, are you prepared for a noble act of self-sacrifice? I want you to read to me, to sing to me, to play to me, to chatter to me, to listen when I chatter to you; to enliven me. Come, my dear, and earn an old lady's gratitude. Give my love to your father, and ask him to spare you to me.'

Olivia was greatly excited at the invitation, and somewhat awed at the idea of a

tête-à-tête visit to so impressive a hostess. Her father at once overruled her scruples at leaving him alone, and entered with zest into the spirit of the expedition. 'It will give me an excuse for a visit to London,' he said, 'which I like of all things. I shall enjoy my Olivia's enjoyment as much as she does. It is a reward for her patience under misfortunes, her content with a humble home; and, besides, I would do anything for Lady Heriot, my dear and excellent friend. I wish old ladies nowadays kept private chaplains. That would be the post for me. Meanwhile my Olivia will see the world, and the world will see my Olivia and be delighted with her. She will be admired, she will be loved as she deserves. I have been a horrid old monopolist to keep you here. Go, child, where fortune calls you.'

CHAPTER VI

A GREEN OLD AGE

‘Sydneyan showers
Of sweet discourse, whose powers
Can crown old Winter’s head with flowers.’

THE aspect of Lady Heriot’s house was not, at first sight, exhilarating. Its magnificence was of that solid, comfortable order which, above everything, dislikes to be too fine. Some of the drawing-rooms, to which Olivia now accompanied her hostess for five-o’clock tea, were a great deal too fine for Lady Heriot’s taste. ‘They ought to be put in a glass case and sent to the South Kensington Museum,’ she told Olivia, as they got home from a visit to a specially ornate abode; ‘but to live in—no, thank you, my dear; give me

a comfortable sofa, near enough to the fire, and not a wilderness of fine things where one cannot walk with safety or sit at ease. Every silly young woman of the present day wants to make her drawing-room a palace of art ; I like mine to be the home of conversation ; and homes should be snug and comfortable, and not too smart. I want my visitors not to admire my gimcracks, but to talk to me and amuse me——'

'And admire you,' said Olivia, always ready with an agreeable suggestion, 'as they all do. All the same, Lady Heriot, the pretty things are wonderfully pretty, and if one cannot think of anything to say, as is often my plight, it is a comfort to look at them and find something to talk about.'

'You may talk about this sofa, if you please,' said her companion, settling herself comfortably upon it. 'Is it not a good one ? Tell me the truth.'

'Well, then,' said Olivia, 'it is a good one,

of course, but I don't like those red and white roses ; they stand up so, that one hardly dares to sit down upon them.'

' My dear,' said Lady Heriot, ' that only shows how well they are painted. My sofa is a beauty ; at any rate it is quite fine enough for an old woman like me to rest my bones on. Those roses were greatly admired, I can tell you, when I first set them up, and a great many good people have sat upon them since then, and so I love them. As for cabinets, mine are old enough and odd enough, in all conscience ; and they are full of Dresden and Sèvres shepherdesses, I believe, for those who care about them, which I do not happen to do.'

Olivia was speedily converted to the in-artistic simplicity of her hostess's abode, and found herself quite at home in it. It was a most amusing place. Lady Heriot's privileges as an invalid warranted just enough disorder to enhance comfort and banish the

possibility of stiffness. Old age, like other infirmities, may, in skilful hands, become an element of social success. People came to see Lady Heriot in compliance with her petition to take pity on an old woman whose infirmities debarred her from the pleasures of the outside world. They invariably found a cheerful hostess, better posted up than themselves in current gossip, longing to know of what was going on in the world, and quite prepared to meet them half way in being amusing and amused. Lady Heriot had not lived all those years for nothing ; she had known a host of people all the time her husband had been in Parliament, some of them already beginning to be historical. She remembered a story and knew how to tell it. Her five-o'clock tea was a most popular beverage ; and quite a little crowd would gather to drink it. So it came about that, in the course of the afternoon, a great many nice people dropped in, and left a small

residuum of wit behind them. It is a great thing to know a house where the hostess is always at home, and always delighted to see you. There were several elderly gentlemen who would have considered a Sunday in town exceptionally ill spent, part of which had not been passed by the side of Lady Heriot's sofa. Stonehouse, the distinguished Queen's Counsel and M.P., who had no leisure for ordinary society, managed to forget his briefs and his clients, and unbent his great intellect under the soothing influence of Lady Heriot's companionship ; Mr. Pygmalion, a power in the world of art, was well pleased to convey to her the latest gossip from the Royal Academy ; Dr. Crucible deserted his favourite arm-chair at the Athenæum in order to bring an amusing book or expound the newest theory that stirred the philosophic world ; now it would be Lord Melrose, an accomplished ex-diplomat, untiring collector and retailer of every form of social curiosity ; now

Desmond, an Irish Dean, providentially supplied with a never-failing cruse of excellent stories at his countrymen's expense. Even young Mr. de Renzi, the brightest of rising political stars, who was in great request and capable of giving himself airs with common mortals, never showed them to Lady Heriot, but would come and spend a pleasant half-hour, and take real pains to be amusing. Lady Heriot's panegyric on her sofa was, Olivia felt, extremely well deserved.

When they were alone together, Lady Heriot proved a delightful companion. 'Tis pleasant,' she said one day as the door closed upon the last departing guest—

"'Tis pleasant, through the loopholes of retreat,
To peep at such a world, to see the stir
Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd"—

The trade of being an old lady is not such a bad one, is it, Olivia? Every one is so kind to me. But you have been indoors too long, and are losing your roses. Go out now with

my excellent Phillips and have a good walk across the park. Then we will go on with our third volume, which I am longing to hear.'

Olivia was under a spell. Lady Heriot looked older and frailer than she remembered her at Huntsham, and was gentler than ever. She touched Olivia by her cordial enjoyment of the pleasures of life—already quickly passing beyond her reach—by considerate care, by unobtrusive contrivances to amuse her guest. There is something solemn in one's communications with the old—so soon to cease. They have the air of a farewell. A subtle, tender melancholy breathes over the commonplaces of everyday life; a thousand little monitions remind us that the end is drawing near.

Youth is beautiful, but there is a beauty about a good old age which rivals youth, and a pathos that is all its own. Old age—wise, calm, and patient—that has learnt from the

troubles of life the divine lesson of compassion—old age, that

‘dares send
A challenge to his end,
And, when it comes, say, “Welcome, friend”’—

old age, refined by experience into generous sympathy—for which the struggles of life are over, but not its interests—which kindles over the new life that is coming up,—which views the turmoils of existence as from some mountain height, through an atmosphere which softens each crude colour and dulls each harsh outline—what better things have youth and strength to show us? what more dignified, more ennobling, more really beautiful, like mellow music, good for heart and nerves?

So Olivia found her life very interesting, very charming, and, in a charming way, a little sad.

In many effusive letters to her father she portrayed her impressions of Lady Heriot's

companionship. The visit was doing her good in every way—in mind, and, through the mind, in body. She caught something of her companion's serenity. It added to her happiness that Lady Heriot petted her with much admiring solicitude, made much of her performances on the pianoforte, and greatly appreciated her literary tastes. Olivia's musical education had been but scanty; but taste and love had supplemented it with a hundred unstudied graces. Her father loved a good tune, and sang Moore's melodies in soft tenor tones, which often brought the tears into Olivia's eyes as she accompanied him. Many a well-loved and familiar air had Olivia studied for her father's benefit and filled their quiet evenings with delight. Now Lady Heriot bade her produce them, and remembered one old friend after another—as she sat listening in the twilight—and, as each piece ended, would still beg for another, and applaud the per-

formance with sympathetic cordiality. She took Olivia's hand fondly, as she came from the piano and sat beside her : ' That is quite a treat, my dear ; yours is the way that I like people to play—not too difficult for unlearned ears and simple tastes—and playing all as if you loved it, as I know you do, and so do I.'

' You are such a good listener, Lady Heriot,' said Olivia, greatly delighted ; ' that is half the battle when one plays ; some people freeze the very soul within one. But for you ! I love these airs all the better when I know that you are listening to them.'

' I have heard some delightful music in my day,' said her companion, ' and I am the better for it, the richer. I lie sometimes in the silence of a sleepless night and recall some hours of enjoyment that have enriched my life for ever after. Music is a kind goddess ; she is good to the old people and infirm : she does not, as some pleasures do,

keep all her favours for the young, the vigorous, the bright, who least stand in need of consolation. When, in the guise of a sweet young lady, she comes and sits by my sofa and fills my ears with tuneful echoes of old days, I like her very much indeed. But you must be quite tired.'

'No, indeed,' cried Olivia, to whom this sort of talk made the idea of fatigue seem very remote, 'I only feel refreshed. You must have a great store of nice recollections?'

'Yes,' said her companion, 'they are the riches of the old; our compensation for some things which we old people cannot have—some pleasures which have ceased to please—some hopes extinguished—some companionship that we may share no more this side the grave. Meanwhile our store of happy memories is for ever growing. With pleasant memories and good books one is always well off.'

'Ah!' said Olivia, 'your books! You have got some good ones, indeed!'

'Yes,' said the other, 'they are among one's best friends indeed as one gets on in years. One advantage of being seventy, and lame, and too ill to move about, is that one has leisure to read, and need not be so shamefully illiterate as the busy people always are. "A good book," Milton said, "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." But then I am not always so fortunate as to have any one who reads to me so well as you do. I cannot tell you, my dear, what it is to have some delightful volume pumped over one by an uninterested and unsympathetic reader: it is often my fate. My good Phillips is a paragon, as you see; but for reading! her suppressed yawns! her inconceivable mistakes! her blank indifference to what she is about! her sudden arrest in the midst of something really

delightful to give me my medicine or put me to bed! It is hard to bear. As for your Cousin Isabella, she reads worse than Phillips does. So you see, my dear, your reading is a real holiday to me. I enjoy it thoroughly.'

'And I too enjoy it,' said Olivia; 'a nice book, like solitude, is all the nicer for some one to whom one can say how nice it is. And then your books are very nice.'

So Olivia found that her services were in great request, and went roaming about her dear hostess's well-filled shelves for something that would prove congenial reading. Many a half-forgotten volume did she bring to light. The two would settle down with real excitement, on some new-found treasure.

'Good, good,' Lady Heriot would say, her eyes lighting up with pleasure and animation; 'you are a good girl, Olivia, a clever girl. The worst of it is that I shall never be able to get on without you.'

CHAPTER VII

GLORIOUS APOLLO

‘In the very May-morn of his youth,
Ripe for exploits and mighty enterprises.’

So Olivia lingered on, fortified by cheerful injunctions from her father to enjoy a good time while it lasted, and loth to leave the dear friend who needed her so much, and was goodness itself to her. Several of the frequenters of Lady Heriot’s drawing-room soon understood Olivia’s charm, and began to be very polite to her. Dr. Crucible took her over his Museum, and devoted an afternoon to explaining its wonders and mysteries. Mrs. Hazelden carried her off to a concert, where music—such as Olivia’s imagination

had never dreamt of—the symphony of a perfect orchestra, or the miracles of a master-hand or voice, sent her home oppressed with happy rapture. Stonehouse astonished even Lady Heriot—who knew the kind heart that glowed under an exterior of stately politeness—by volunteering to come and dine, and afterwards escort Olivia to the play. ‘Would Olivia like it?’ Olivia, who had never set foot in a theatre, and to whom her father’s stories and recitations had conveyed a vague but delightful conception of the glories of the stage! Stonehouse, who awed everybody, possessed no terrors for Olivia. The two went off in great glee and came back in the highest spirits, declaring that they had had a delightful evening. Everybody, Olivia began to feel, was conspiring to pet her. Not least among the excitements, which at this time stirred existence to a ferment, was the intelligence that Lady Heriot was bent on giving her a

lovely dress, such as the female imagination might rejoice to think of, and youth and beauty rejoice to wear—and that Mrs. Hazelden, in furtherance of this benevolent design, had already arranged a pilgrimage with her to an illustrious mistress of that imperial art. Olivia was woman enough to feel this a very soul-stirring event indeed.

Still greater excitements were, however, awaiting her. One afternoon, when Lady Heriot's tea-party was at its height, a visitor was announced, whose manner and appearance bespoke him not in the roll of common men. It was Mr. de Renzi. His visit was, if the truth is to be told, due to one of Mrs. Valentine's ingenious arrangements of her little world. ‘I want you,’ she had said to him, as they passed each other on a crowded staircase the night before, ‘to go and pay a visit to my mother; she is in need of amusement. You will be a godsend.’

‘What a curious name to call me!’ said

De Renzi ; ‘of course I will go. I want cheering too. Lady Heriot always infects me with some of her own cheerfulness ; and, besides, Mrs. Heriot’s word is law.’

‘That is very nice of you,’ said the other ; ‘it will be angelic if you will go. Moreover, it is a known fact that virtue often finds a reward where she least expects it.’

‘A reward !’ cried De Renzi ; ‘what can you mean ?’

‘Nothing,’ said Mrs. Valentine ; ‘virtue is its own reward, and reverence to old age one of the most agreeable of virtues. Only go, like a good creature.’

‘And I shall be rewarded ?’ asked her companion.

‘By a good conscience,’ said Mrs. Valentine,—‘best of all rewards.’

‘But that I have already,’ said De Renzi, ‘and I am tired of it.’

‘And my approval ; you are not tired of *that*, I hope.’

‘ You already think me perfection.’

‘ Vanity ! ’ cried Mrs. Valentine ; ‘ how little people know ! But I shall think you several degrees less removed from it if you do as I ask you.’

‘ Mysterious ! ’ said De Renzi, ‘ but I obey.’

‘ Mystery,’ said his companion, looking back, as the crowd swept her downstairs, ‘ mystery is our prerogative and obedience our foible. Good-night, and thank you.’

De Renzi had gone, accordingly, to Seymour Street and found a room full of people —one little group gathered about Lady Heriot, and another round the tea-table, where Olivia was busily ministering to the wants of Lady Heriot’s guests. Amongst the latter Dr. Crucible was occupying a favoured post, and was thoroughly enjoying himself. Olivia was beaming upon him with unsuspicuous gaiety, grateful for being so well amused, and speaking her gratitude with radiant smiles. De Renzi realised the

position at a glance. He made his way to Lady Heriot's sofa; she gave him a place on it.

'Who is the beauty,' he said presently, looking in Olivia's direction, 'who presides, like a young goddess, at your tea-table, Lady Heriot—a fresh-alighted Hebe?'

'That is my new maid of honour,' Lady Heriot said; 'a goddess, as you rightly observe. My Olympus required a Hebe. She is known to mortals as Miss Hillyard. As young men generally want to worship goddesses on the spot, you may, if you please, take my cup to her and ask her for another.'

De Renzi sped joyfully on his mission. 'Lady Heriot bids me introduce myself,' he said, 'and ask you for a second cup; and may I have one for myself?'

Olivia had never before felt shy. Why, in the name of common sense, should shyness now suddenly beset her?

Who was this Apollo-like being, who had risen suddenly into her horizon—bright, impressive, delightful, and, perhaps because of his delightfulness, alarming? What is the secret of the spell that mortals exercise on one another, the spell that dominates, fascinates, and thrills? No explanation can be given except that Heaven has been pleased so to construct, or misconstruct, us that some people have a most unaccountable effect on other people's nerves. Olivia experienced this physiological truth just now with disagreeable acuteness. It was a relief when, after a few sentences, De Renzi left her.

‘What a beauty!’ he said as he rejoined Lady Heriot, ‘and how divinely fresh! Has she ever, till this afternoon, held converse with mortal man? I suppose you had her straight from heaven.’

‘Where, naturally,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, ‘she had but few opportunities of making male acquaintance. Well, Mr. de Renzi, it

you were the first, I hope that you took pains to make a good impression. The race of man will owe you a grudge if you have prepossessed her against them.'

'Awful responsibility!' cried De Renzi; 'but she was too frightened, I am certain, to form a prepossession.'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'the first man a girl knows is generally the beginning of her disillusionments.'

'Possibly,' said De Renzi; 'the fate of humanity is disillusion. Young ladies must be disillusionised like the rest of us. Men may be Nature's humble instrument. It may correspond to the acute form of it, which they themselves experience when they enter public life.'

'Some of us amuse ourselves, during the debates, by rewriting the English poets and improving them. We have just brought out a new edition of "Hohenlinden" for use at Westminster. Allow me to recite a verse—

“A combat threatens,—off, ye crave
'n souls, who seek your seats to save !
Waive, traitors, all your scruples waive,
And change with all your perfidy !”’

‘Well,’ said Lady Heriot, ‘there I agree with you. You young politicians, I admit, have seen enough to make you cynics. The science of politics has been swamped in the art of tergiversation.’

‘As it always must,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, ‘with mob-rule. When you have to court a lot of irrational people, the way to please them is to do the most irrational thing you can think of. Sudden and meaningless change is one form—and a striking one—of irrationality. There are people who think that the only proper use of a coat is to turn it.’

‘Now,’ said De Renzi, ‘I have Mrs. Hazelden on my side, and I can go away in safety and talk to the young goddess, who, I daresay, like other goddesses, young and old, requires adoration. Mrs. Hazelden, I leave my reputation in your hands.’

'A dangerous place to leave it in,' observed Stonehouse, as De Renzi was retreating.

'He is a horrid young cynic,' said Mrs. Hazelden;—

"Would he oblige me? Let me only find
He does not think me what he thinks mankind."

As for what he thinks womankind, no one can even venture to conjecture.'

'He appears to think some portions of it worth cultivation,' said Stonehouse, glancing in the direction where De Renzi had already succeeded in establishing himself by Olivia's chair, and was bending over her with an air of deferential interest. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull politician.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Hazelden, 'and most men have taken care to protect themselves from that particular way of getting dull. Unfortunately there are others.'

'Well,' said Crucible, who, dislodged by De Renzi, had joined Lady Heriot's group, 'De

Renzi is a good judge. The young lady is delightful—

“A rosebud, set with little wilful thorns,
As sweet as English air can make her, she”—

I feel a pang of jealousy even at this distance.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Stonehouse, ‘it is jealousy which leads me to observe that De Renzi’s cynicism is a very mild affair. It merely means that there is a great deal of humanity in human nature, and that the parts of it with which politics are concerned are not the best.’

‘Of course,’ said Crucible, ‘man being asinine, statesmen have to ride their parties, as boys do donkeys, as near as possible upon the tail.’

‘And,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, ‘as far as possible from the seat of intelligence.’

‘What a simile!’ said Stonehouse; ‘a libel on party government in disguise!’

‘Party government!’ said Mrs. Hazelden; ‘it is an old story—a limited democracy that

has destroyed the limitations. The thirty cleverest people in England trying to govern the country, and the thirty next cleverest trying to prevent them—the leaders hoping to save themselves by abandoning their principles, like the parents in the Russian story, by pitching their children to the wolves.'

'The worst of that sort of business,' said Stonehouse, 'is that, sooner or later, the time comes when all the children are used up, and the parents have to decide which shall make jettison of the other.'

'Yes,' said Lady Heriot, 'but, meanwhile, the process is delightfully easy, like the road to Avernus.'

'All the roads to that place,' said Crucible, 'are delightful. It is the journey back that is the rub. They don't issue return-tickets on that line.'

'Anyhow,' said Stonehouse, 'the pace is fast and furious. It is the case of the horse and cart galloping down hill. No one—least

of all the horse—knows whether the horse is running away with the cart, or the cart with the horse.'

'But we can all make a shrewd guess,' said Crucible, 'what will happen at the bottom of the hill.'

'My nerves are weak,' said Lady Heriot, 'and I congratulate myself on the probability that I shall not be there to see.'

CHAPTER VIII

SIC ITUR AD ASTRA

‘On dit que dans ses amours
Il fut caressé des belles,
Qui le suivirent toujours
Tant qu'il marcha devant elles.’

THE great house of De Renzi was a name to conjure with. It was in force wherever finance on a grand scale was stirring, from Gallipoli to San Francisco. It swayed exchanges, it negotiated loans, it floated railways, it inspired syndicates, it turned the flow of capital this way or that ; with a word, a look, markets rose or fell ; investors trembled before it as mortals at the nod of Olympian Jove. Now, too, the family had become political and social. Former genera-

tions had dominated finance; the present achieved something more, the conquest of society. The father of the present head of the family had signalised its triumph by becoming a Christian, a baronet, and an English gentleman. Lady de Renzi's parties were among the smartest, the best, the most sought after, the most written about and talked about in polite London. Two daughters of the family had made distinguished marriages and had carried welcome streams of gold to thirsty regions of the aristocratic world. Two more remained, the cynosure of eager eyes on the look-out for a splendid and profitable alliance. Claude de Renzi's career at Eton and Christchurch had been worthy of his family and himself—characteristically brilliant. The young undergraduate had well maintained the traditional standard of ability and splendour. No golden youth ever lavished an ample patrimony with more refined prodigality. His parties, his

hunters, the exquisite luxury of his rooms, his carefully chosen and splendidly attired library, his collection of priceless inutilities—dear to the heart of the connoisseur—had thrown all rival spendthrifts into the shade, and realised to the ready enthusiasm of his contemporaries the impressive conception of a modern Alcibiades. Grave pedants shook their heads at a license, which not even the wise catholicity of academic indulgence could quite condone. But then pedants were exactly the people whom young De Renzi least cared to conciliate. The tasks which Alma Mater enjoined, and for which she reserved her choicest honours and prizes, revolted him. They had been designed surely to produce that special quality of erudite narrow-mindedness which is the attribute of priests and the qualification of school-masters. At any rate they were not worthy the self-denial and effort necessary for their accomplishment—worth the pleasures of eye,

ear, taste, which civilisation brings within the reach of a refined epicurean !

His college triumphs over, Claude de Renzi had renewed them in London on a more daring scale. His good looks, his brilliant audacity, his vivacious readiness of talk, his well-planned hospitalities soon made him the fashion. His house became presently a favourite resort, as beautiful as art, wealth, and good taste could make it. Fine ladies were delighted to drink tea there, or to bring their daughters to contemplate this modern Mæcenas in his own domain. There were other parties too to which ladies did not come, but which none the less had a celebrity of their own. Claude was an adept in the arts of hospitality. His suppers achieved fame, and deserved it. Artists and authors, actors, actresses—beautiful women and accomplished men—the rising politician, the witty journalist, the lion of the hour, found themselves in a coterie, which each helped to make varied,

brilliant, and amusing. To crown all, De Renzi had fought an election with skill, courage, and address, had made a successful maiden speech, and had established a reputation as one of the rising lights of his party. He seemed likely to be great; and Mrs. Valentine, who had a quick eye for greatness, present or prospective, was delighted to have so notable a guest for little dinners, to which his presence added amusement and *éclat*. One of these was now impending, and Mrs. Valentine responded promptly to her mother-in-law's wish that Olivia should be well amused, by inviting her to fill a vacant place. Mr. Stonehouse and Pygmalion were to be among the other guests.

Mrs. Heriot, expert in her management of mankind, was accustomed, on these occasions, to send De Renzi in to dinner with a pretty woman, and to let him sit next herself.

De Renzi had thus a twofold obligation to

render himself agreeable. The beauty provided on this occasion for him was Mrs. Backhouse, a brilliant being, one of the brightest luminaries in Mrs. Valentine's social horizon. Her beauty acquired additional interest from the circumstance that her husband was making, or had made, a colossal fortune on the Stock Exchange. There was, too, Stoddart, who represented a Scotch borough; and had just returned from a rough encounter with his constituents. Several of the guests were already intimate with each other ; those who were not desired to become so. All wished to please and hoped to be pleased. Everything promised favourably. Mrs. Valentine's guests were always confident in her power to consort them agreeably and to feed them well.

De Renzi found Mrs. Backhouse delightful, and between his two ladies, both of whom required attention, had his hands full ; but he was undaunted by the emergency. Every-

body was talking too fast to allow of personal attention, and, besides, Mr. Pygmalion, on Mrs. Backhouse's other side, was bent on absorbing her if De Renzi had given him an opportunity. Mrs. Backhouse, however, had no wish to be absorbed, and bent a gracious ear to De Renzi's merry flow of talk.

Stoddart had just been relating some of his experience in being 'heckled.'

'Your constituents have been giving you a treat!' said Stonehouse; 'what a price to pay for the eminence of politics!'

'Eminence!' said Stoddart ruefully; 'abyss, you mean.'

'Stoddart,' said Pygmalion, 'has been realising the truth of an observation of De Tocqueville's, that there is nothing which a man cannot, if necessary, learn to put up with, except the manners of another class than his own.'

'And such a class!' cried Stoddart; 'ignorant, coarse, violent people, vested with

power, without a notion how to use it, and roused into a passion by unwholesome doses of rhetoric. Can any one expect to like it?’

‘Sir Thomas Browne,’ said Pygmalion, ‘was always good, but is best about the mob. He had it not in him, he says, to hate anybody, not even Frenchmen for eating frogs and toadstools; nor Jews for their weakness for locusts and grasshoppers; nor a salad gathered in a churchyard; nor serpents, scorpions, or salamanders; nor even that imperial salamander, the devil himself. “But,” says that exemplary person, if I remember him rightly, “if there be any among those common objects of hatred I do contemn and laugh at, it is that great enemy of reason, virtue, and religion, the multitude —that numerous piece of monstrosity which, if taken asunder, seem men and the reasonable creatures of God, but, confused together, make a great beast and a monstrosity more prodigious than Hydra.”’

'He was a dear man,' said Mrs. Backhouse; 'how I wish he was alive, that one might ask him to five-o'clock tea.'

'Philosophers have observed,' said Stonehouse, 'that mankind is a physic, which, if taken at all, needs to be taken in homœopathic doses—not in such hideous conglomerations as poor Stoddart has had to gulp.'

'It is a fearful illustration,' said Pygmalion, 'of what the evolutionists are preaching to us, the essential bestiality of man. The mob is, as Sir T. Browne said, a great beast.'

'And the mob's idea of evolution,' said Stonehouse, 'is, as Lowell has put it, to spell it with an initial R.'

'But evolution spells itself with an initial R,' said Pygmalion; 'it is essentially revolutionary. Even in the days of Aristophanes the law of physics—say, the whirlpool theory or the cosmic dust theory, or what you please—had driven the Lord of Olympus off the field. Do you remember the passage, De

Renzi? You are the last of us from school.'

'Perfectly,' said De Renzi, 'and the translation—

"An age when folk have grown too clever to believe,
And evolution has disposed of Eve."¹

'Poor Eve,' cried Mrs. Valentine, 'the fairest of her daughters she! but she is a ruined woman. Her reputation was hopelessly damaged in *Paradise Lost*. Who will rehabilitate her?'

'I will,' said De Renzi; 'she deserves all the sympathy that you ladies can give her. Her retreat after dinner, when the conversation threatened to become tedious, shows that the enslavement of women began even before the fall of man. Do you remember the lines? I learnt them at Eton for an imposition—

"So spake our sire, and by his count'nance seemed
Entering on studious thoughts abstruse; which Eve

¹ De Renzi must have been thinking of

Δίνος βασιλεῦε τὸν Δέ' ἐξεληλακῶς.

Perceiving, where she sat retired from sight,
With loveliness majestic from her seat,
And grace that won, who saw, to wish her stay,
Rose, and went forth amid her fruits and flowers,
To visit how they prospered, bud and bloom,
Her nursery"—

'Her nursery!' cried Pygmalion; 'that was a little premature, surely.'

'A hint,' cried Mrs. Valentine, 'to us to leave the gentlemen to their cigars; but we refuse to act on the Miltonic precedent.'

'Quite right,' said Pygmalion; 'Milton was a horrid old misogynist. There are some things he said about the first Mrs. Milton that I shudder to remember and refuse to repeat.'

'Which means that you are dying to repeat them,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'and we to hear. Let us have the worst.'

'Impossible,' said Pygmalion; 'it is enough that Dr. Johnson summed up Milton as atoning for public license by domestic despotism, and as holding that every man

was born to be a rebel, and every woman a slave.'

'Inquisitiveness is unallayed,' insisted Mrs. Valentine; 'let us hear the worst.'

'Well,' said Stonehouse, 'what can be worse than bringing a nice young bride from a merry home of Oxfordshire fox-hunters, boring her to death, no doubt, with Puritanic dissertations in the style of *Paradise Lost*, then dubbing her as "mute and insensate," and when the poor creature could bear it no longer and fled to her father's for a respite, starting a flirtation with another woman and propounding "the doctrine and discipline of divorce restored, to the good of both sexes" ?'

'That is worst with a vengeance,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'and Milton too!'

'But then,' put in Mrs. Valentine, 'he was a poet, and poets are chartered libertines, like German sovereigns. A poet may be as eccentric as he pleases.'

‘However,’ said Stonehouse, ‘there is one agreeable trait in the Miltonic scene which Mr. de Renzi omitted. Eve retreated, you may remember, not because she disliked philosophy, but because she liked her husband’s way of putting it better than the angel’s. She missed the “grateful digression” of an occasional caress.’

‘Ah,’ said Mrs. Pygmalion, ‘I was reading somewhere, the other day, that men always want to stop the mouths of female propagandists by kissing them. They got the hint from Adam.’

‘A time-honoured form of argument,’ said Stonehouse, ‘which we all approve.’

‘And too seldom, unfortunately,’ said De Renzi, ‘get a chance of practising.’

‘But,’ said Mrs. Backhouse, who occasionally played the rôle of the engaging *ingénue*, ‘I cannot imagine an angel kissing one—can you?’

‘I have kissed angels,’ said De Renzi; ‘I hope to kiss some more.’

'Well,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'it is a fact, is it not, that almost all great men have maltreated their wives? Lord Byron and Andrea del Sarto, and Shelley and that sort of person; I never can remember names, but I know that there is quite a list of them.'

'But the Shelley set pressed their privileges too far,' said Pygmalion. 'They got quite into a jumble. Between the different ladies one never can remember who is who.'

'No,' said Stonehouse, 'nor who is whose. Still it is, no doubt, the attribute of genius to make women miserable.'

'Yes, and what a blessing it is,' cried De Renzi, 'and how grateful we ought to be that things are ordered so nicely!'

'I don't see that at all,' said Mrs. Backhouse; 'the wives of the greatest men ought to be the happiest women; oughtn't they?'

'No,' said De Renzi, with enthusiasm; 'the happy woman is lost to society; she ruins her husband and herself. The first

condition of social brilliancy is domestic gloom. The modern enchantress must have some high lonely tower where she "may oft outwatch the Bear"; that is, a dull country house and a conjugal bear who goes to bed at ten o'clock. Like the dying dolphin of the Roman banquet, the suffering woman wears a thousand lovely hues. She is brilliant, she is tender, she is sympathetic, she is deliciously confidential, she is eloquently reticent. Once happy, she loses the wish to charm, and, with the wish, the power. She basks in the stupefying sunshine of conjugal felicity; she becomes mute and insensate like Mrs. Milton; she has a nursery full of horrid little pledges of love; the clink of tea-cups and the warbling of babies fill her ears; nurses and governesses bound her horizon; she loses her care for society, the world; she loses her ambition; she loses her figure; she becomes a little dump, or expands, under the fostering influences of

domestic bliss, into the elephantine, and goes “stretching many a rood,” like the Miltonic Satan, all the vast fabric palpitating with affection.’

‘Stop, stop,’ cried Mrs. Valentine; ‘all of us here are extremely happy. Do you dare to tell us that we are all the horrid things you mention, or ever will be?’

‘Every law has its exceptions,’ said De Renzi, ‘and this law has three charming ones to-night. Besides, it is the prerogative of genius to obey no law.’

‘What a dreadful law, though,’ said Mrs. Backhouse, ‘if one happened not to be one of the exceptions, and what an embarrassing alternative if one had to choose!’

‘I should pronounce unhesitatingly for unhappiness,’ said Mrs. Pygmalion; ‘Mr. de Renzi’s portrait of the happy mother quite haunts me.’

‘Naturally,’ said Pygmalion.

"What is your sex's earliest latest care,
Your heart's supreme ambition? To be fair."

'This is horrible,' said Mrs. Valentine.
'Let us go away and cultivate a little unhappiness by ourselves. One remark I will make in retreating. If beauty depends on conjugal unhappiness, many of us ought to be a great deal prettier than we are.'

CHAPTER IX

DIPLOMACY

‘Ah ! that deceit should steal such gentle shapes,
And with a virtuous vizard hide deep vice !’

VALENTINE was furious when he heard of the occurrences at Huntsham—of Jack having been induced to cut off the entail, of the disgraceful episode of the execution. He went to his mother, and speedily infected her with his own indignation. Lady Heriot had been very much aggrieved, and was not difficult to move to actual anger. The whole thing was an indignity ; the family name was disgraced. It seemed inconceivable that such an outrage should occur in the home—the house where so many generations of

Heriots had lived in honour, plenty, and dignity. So Valentine had no difficulty in raising his mother's displeasure to the level of his own.

'Adrian has disgraced us all,' he said, 'and injured us. To me it is a very tangible injury. What a pleasant thing, when I go into the City, for my friends to be telling about one's brother!'

'We may hope that nobody knows it,' said his mother; 'the bills were paid at once, before any one knew.'

'Not know?' cried Valentine. 'Of course everybody knew; everybody always does know that sort of pleasant news. Depend upon it, such a piece of gossip as that was chattered over, within twenty-four hours, in every drawing-room in the county, in every attorney's office, in every tradesman's back parlour! How nice for me, who have my own way to make in the world, and am dependent for all I can do on the con-

fidence I inspire! and how much confidence are people likely to feel in a man, the head of whose family is being dunned by tradesmen for their accounts, and haunted by sheriff's officers in his own country house?'

'It is hard, Valentine,' his mother said, 'very hard on you, I quite feel that. Adrian's misfortunes have not fallen on his own shoulders only.'

'Adrian's misfortunes!' cried Valentine; 'I am tired of hearing of them. He has one misfortune, mother, the misfortune of being a fool—an obstinate fool. He would have his way; he knew he was right, you know, like the man in Trollope's story—he would do what he chose, despite of all we could do to stop him: and now what is his position, and what is Jack's?'

'Yes, indeed,' said Lady Heriot; 'poor boy, it is hard on him.'

'He starts life,' Valentine continued, 'a beggar, and all through his father's folly—

his patrimony wasted, his position ruined. What on earth is to become of him? We shall have to support him, I suppose, and give him a start in life if he be unlike enough to his father to be capable of starting. But, from all I hear, Jack is as great a fool as Adrian.'

'Poor fellow!' said Lady Heriot, 'that is a strong thing to say of him. But what could we expect? His mother, too!'

'Yes,' said Valentine, 'Eugenia is a fool too, a self-complacent fool. Three people better contrived for making a mess of their concerns, I cannot imagine.'

Conversations such as this left their mark on Lady Heriot's mind, and prepared her for a change of purpose. The question began to suggest itself with increased force and frequency, whether she might not be acting in the true interests of her family, as well as administering a well-deserved punishment on its delinquent Head, if she made some

change in the existing disposition of her wealth. Hitherto her main object had been to help Adrian generously as the one of her children who most needed help. The family fortunes must be restored, the family honour saved, and the master of Huntsham be made to stand free from embarrassments. But now all these good objects were past praying for. The disgrace had been incurred. The house and park were in the market. A London tradesman—a fashionable tailor, it was said—was negotiating for it. Lady Heriot's soul grew dark with anger. Righteous indignation is a seductive and dangerous feeling. When once you recognise the right and duty of punishing others, it is difficult to stay your hand in the exercise of the punitive function, and to say how hard the scourge shall fall, and how many blows will adequately meet the culprit's delinquency.

The more Lady Heriot thought it over, the more did her feeling of provocation with

Sir Adrian and Lady Eugenia grow. They had made a lifelong series of mistakes, and now they had crowned their mismanagement by a disaster, the discredit of which all the family had to share. Why put more money in their way, to follow, no doubt, where so much good money had already gone?

Lady Heriot played with the thought, and found it a consolatory vent for the vexation that Sir Adrian was constantly occasioning her. It was, at present, a toy rather than an expedient, which she thought seriously of adopting. But the idea became familiar, as congenial visitors will. It had made itself at home.

Lady Heriot had made a rule, all her life, never to say anything to her children as to the disposal of her money, nor to allow them to talk to her about it—a rule which none of them had ever ventured to infringe. Now, however, her thoughts were so full of the subject that she could not help hinting at it

to Mrs. Valentine. ‘I am in great perplexity, Isabella,’ she said; ‘Adrian’s affairs are a source of endless worry to me.’

‘Are they?’ said Mrs. Valentine; ‘I am sorry for that, mother.’

Mrs. Valentine was a woman of tact, and a prudential instinct warned her that the present occasion demanded a display of innocent unconcern, and a complete concealment of feelings which she was conscious of entertaining toward the Lord of Huntsham, his wife, and heir. Certain visions had flitted through her brain of what might have been, had things gone a little otherwise than they had—if, for instance, Eugenia, whose contributions to the human race had, with a single exception, been exclusively feminine, had not been fated to prelude the list with a boy. She found it impossible not to remember that, but for the inconvenient intrusion of Jack, her husband’s prospects, her own, and those of her little Antinous would have been

very different from what they were. That little Antinous! Mrs. Heriot's heart was not a soft one; the vicissitudes of an aspiring existence had hardened it; but for this child there was a spot, where the tender maternal graces flourished, like the garden of wild flowers on the Mer de Glace. No one who—however remotely, however unintentionally—had injured this precious little fellow, could fail to incur his mother's undying animosity. Jack, through circumstances beyond his control, had injured him very much indeed.

As Lady Heriot now approached this delicate topic, generally guarded so sedulously from all approach, her daughter's heart began to beat. She was conscious of the necessity of especial self-control.

'I am perplexed,' Lady Heriot continued, 'perplexed and harassed. It is right for me to do all I can to help Adrian. His dear father would have wished it. I have always intended it; but there are limits.'

Lady Heriot's mood might now, Mrs. Valentine thought, with safety receive a little gentle encouragement. 'It is a grievous trouble,' she said sympathetically; 'Valentine is feeling it very much. He feels it a sort of a stain on the honour of the family.'

'If Adrian had only taken Valentine's advice,' continued Lady Heriot, 'all might have been avoided. But he will be advised by no one.'

'Poor Eugenia!' said Mrs. Valentine.

'I feel it difficult to pity her,' said Lady Heriot; 'she ought to have helped Adrian, but she is helplessness itself. How is one to help such people?'

Mrs. Valentine's inquisitiveness was becoming acute. 'Valentine feels the effects of it,' she said, 'among his business friends. Money likes money, and a family whose Head cannot pay his tradesmen's bills is not a connection that City people care about.'

'It is a great shame,' said Lady Heriot,

by this time worked into a thoroughly angry mood ; ‘what am I to do ? I have others to think of besides Adrian. I must do justice to all my children, if I can ; but how ?’

‘Valentine’s great anxiety,’ said Mrs. Valentine, ‘is that Adrian should be kept from further trouble. Of late each fresh step has carried him deeper into it. Of course, Valentine would always be ready to stand by his brother ; but he may not be able ; as was the case the other day about the execution : he really had not the money at his command.’

‘Of course not,’ said Lady Heriot ; ‘I found it excessively inconvenient to find the money myself. I believe I sold out at a loss ; but I was too hurried to be able to consider that, and too mortified to care. It was a question of disgrace.’

‘Such questions may occur again,’ said Mrs. Valentine, playing nervously round the suggestion which she longed to make, but dared not, namely, that Valentine should be

left master of Lady Heriot's money, with discretion to help his brother at an emergency.

'They may, and they will,' said Lady Heriot with a decisive air; 'I do not intend any more of my money to be wasted, as too much has been already, in paying debts that seem to grow all the faster for paying. The best thing I can do for Adrian and for us all is to protect him from his own indiscretion and his creditors' rapacity. I am certain that he gets horribly cheated.'

'There can be no doubt of that,' said her daughter-in-law. 'A good man of business would soon put his concerns to rights and frighten off the sharks. As it is, the more he has, the more they prey upon him.'

'And giving money to Jack,' said Lady Heriot, thinking the matter out exactly in the direction which Mrs. Valentine desired, 'is only giving it to his father.'

'It is a pity that Jack is a socialist,' said Mrs. Valentine, by this time grown courageous

by success. ‘He came to dine with us the other night and talked like a madman. He has been to their meetings, and gave us a tirade on the coming revolution. If a few of us get our throats cut in the regeneration of society, so much the better.’

‘The boy is a fool, of course,’ said Lady Heriot; ‘how could he be anything else? But socialism and revolution! that is past a joke. I will not allow any nonsense of that sort here.’

‘The worst of it is,’ said the diplomatist, ‘that he is in love with Olivia Hillyard. Eugenia had them both together at Hunts-ham, left them for a fortnight to make love to each other—the one thing, it appears, that Jack is an adept at—and now professes to be astonished at the result. Of course it would be his ruin and the girl’s, or Adrian would not have encouraged it.’

Lady Heriot said nothing, but that evening she wrote a note to Mr. Graves begging

him to come and call upon her at his earliest convenience.

Valentine was rather taken aback when his wife reported to him her afternoon's conversation with his mother. 'I do not want to do Adrian a bad turn,' he said; 'I do not care about the money.'

'Don't you?' said his wife; 'well, I do. I will not see £50,000 slip out of our fingers if I can help it. Why, Valentine, you are as soft as Adrian. Think of his last letter to you.'

This last letter was a sore point. Valentine was a good-natured man, as far as business allows of good nature; but his amiability was not proof against his brother's rudeness. Adrian's letter had been angry, unreasonable, offensive. He had applied to Valentine, at the crisis of the execution, and begged him to back a bill, which his bankers then would honour. 'For God's sake, Valentine,' he had written, 'stand by me now, like a good fellow,

and help me to pull through. If I can only get a little time to look about me, all can be arranged. I have settled to sell the Hargrove timber, and I give you my word of honour I can and will meet the bill. Blood is thicker than water, old fellow—I count on you.'

Blood may be thicker than water and be very poor stuff for all that. Valentine fumed over the letter. His wife read it with derisive laughter. The result showed that Adrian's experience of human nature, at any rate of the fraternal side of it, was incomplete. Valentine's answer was courteous, regretful, but firm. Backing bills was the one thing he never did, never had done, and never would, for any one—not even for his brother. It would be absolutely fatal to his reputation to have it known that he had been guilty of such an indiscretion. 'I am a poorer man than you think, Adrian,' he had written. 'The most valuable thing I have is my credit; and where would my credit be if paper with

our joint signatures on it were once to get about? I had far rather send you the sum you want at once. I would if I could, but it is impossible. I am hard run just now, and it is all that I can do to meet my business calls. Times are as bad with us business people as with you country gentlemen. I am truly sorry.'

Then Sir Adrian had breathed a deep oath and written the objectionable letter—the letter of a proud, sensitive man, who has humbled himself in vain, and who thinks he does well to be angry at his bootless humiliation. Wise men know that of all profitless, expensive, foolish things an angry letter is the worst. It can do no good; it cannot be forgiven or forgotten; it cannot be toned down by manner or voice; it cannot be recalled. There it stands, in damning black and white, for the recipient to read over, in what mood he pleases, and to make the worst of. Valentine and his wife had read Sir Adrian's

letter and had felt it to be very bad. Adrian was an impossible man at the best of times ; but Adrian in a passion ! it was piteous. So when Mrs. Valentine bade her husband remember his brother's letter, she laid her adroit hand on a very tender spot. Valentine found comfort in reflecting that he had himself never broached the subject, and that conversations between his wife and mother were matters which, however much he wished, he was practically powerless to control.

CHAPTER X

LE FOU QUI CROIT AU LENDEMAIN

““ Is the world so bad,
While I hear nothing of it through the trees ?
The world was always evil ; but so bad ? ”
“ So bad, Aurora, dear ; my spirit is grey
With poring over the long sum of ill.” ”

JACK, it was now certain, could not hope to live, like a gentleman, in quiet enjoyment of ancestral rents. That dream had passed. He must earn his living by sinew or by brain. Jack’s sinews were of the best order, cultivated into exuberant prowess by all the varieties of athleticism in which young English gentlemen consider it necessary to be proficient. He had played cricket, rowed, hunted and fished, scaled Alpine heights, and perse-

cuted the dwindling population of his father's coverts till he looked a young Hercules. If legs could win in the race of life, or stalwart arms secure its prizes, Jack's fortune would have been assured. His brain, too, was not amiss, though never as severely disciplined as his outer man. He could think, and, as his father was constrained to admit, he could argue. Just now his head was packed full of socialist theories, the fallacy of which Sir Adrian felt it a solemn duty as a father, a landowner, and a loyal subject to expose. These extravagant ideas were the fruit of a visit which Jack had paid to an old college friend who was now a curate in Shoreditch, who found no difficulty in convincing Jack by ocular demonstration that ours is not the best of all possible worlds, and that the conditions of human life—human life in Shoreditch, at any rate—were very far indeed from being what they ought to be. Jack had seen sights and heard sounds that sent him shiver-

ing away, and haunted him afterwards like a nightmare. His eager brain was on fire—he was prepared for radicalism, socialism, revolution, anything except acquiescence in a realised pandemonium. He broke in upon the still atmosphere of his father's dinner-table with blasts of declamation. One evening, when Hillyard was a guest, the conversation turned on the problem of great cities, and when Lady Eugenia had retired, Jack gave the gentlemen the benefit of some of his London experiences. His hearers seemed to him strangely unimpressed.

' My dear Jack,' said Hillyard as he passed the claret jug on to him, ' what call in the world have you to go and dip your clean young fingers in fœce Romuli ? It is dirty stuff, and always will be dirty, I am afraid, and there is a great deal of it. You would have employed these lovely days far better in fishing in the stream here, and learning the kindly lessons that Nature preaches. Everything about

London is oppressively big, its crime and miseries among the rest. There are some things which it is well for young folks to leave alone—the London slums, perhaps, among them.'

'Ah, sir,' cried Jack, by this time kindling into something like explosive heat, 'how easy it is to call them "slums" and have done with it! But do you realise what it means, that millions should be living like brute beasts, without the wholesome customs and instincts of the brutes.'

'Come, come, Jack,' said his father, 'you are pitching it too high, surely. These poor people, who have shocked you so much, are badly off enough, no doubt; a good many of them because they will spend in beer what they ought to spend on their families: but are you sure that they are as bad, or that their life is as wretched as you fancy? I do not believe it.'

'No, father,' cried Jack, 'no one could

believe it without seeing, and no one cares to see ; and so every one disbelieves. But go about the lanes and alleys in the East End and see the life that people have to live, and the dens they live in. It is not life ; it has none of the things that make life tolerable.'

' Not tolerable to *you*,' said Hillyard, ' but tolerable, demonstrably, to *them*, inasmuch as they tolerate it.'

' Yes,' cried Jack, ' but for how long ? This monster—the masses—which we have allowed to grow up, miserable, depraved, with nothing to care for, nothing to fear, nothing to hope—it will turn upon society and rend us ; it will clutch, some day, at the pleasures which we have monopolised ; it will break its bonds ; it will destroy the society which provided for it nothing but toil, poverty, and crime. I for one shall cry, " God speed." '

' When you go on in that way, Jack,' said his father, refilling his glass, ' you talk like a madman. Tall talk and hot talk on such

subjects is the very mischief. Supposing these poor people, whose lot troubles you so much, are roused into violence, and succeed in destroying society, what next? Will they be better off when they have driven the capitalist to other countries? when they have destroyed our trade, as they easily may, for the English capitalist has a hard time of it already? when they have broken up the most orderly, peaceable, prosperous community the world has ever seen? for it is so, Jack, you cannot get over the figures. The working classes, whatever miseries you see, are better off than ever before. If they could only be cured of intemperance they might enjoy a prosperity the like of which the world has never seen. Surely it is only madmen and fanatics who would dash such a fabric to pieces on the chance of something better rising from its ruins.'

'That is always said,' cried Jack.

'But if it is true,' said Hillyard, taking the

opportunity to fill his glass and push the bottle across to Sir Adrian, ‘the oftener it is said the better. Recollect, it is God’s world, not ours.’

‘I sometimes doubt it,’ said Jack ; ‘God, at any rate, has left it to its fate—perhaps as a bad job.’

‘That is a sort of atheism,’ said his father ; ‘take care what you say.’

‘Yes, Jack,’ said Mr. Hillyard, ‘and take care what you feel. The world, no doubt, has many things awry : but that sort of talking has never helped to cure them.’

‘And what does religion do ?’ cried Jack. ‘If you could see the Shoreditch public-houses of a Sunday evening !—

“This world that we have made,
They say God made it first, but, if He did,
'Twas so long since ; and, since, we have spoiled it so,
He scarce would know it, if He looked this way,
From hells we preach of, with the flames blown out.”

‘It is not spoilt here, at any rate,’ said

Hillyard, getting up and going to the window, which opened upon the lawn, where the last sweet lights of an evening summer day were pouring a mellow glow on lawn and flower-beds and distant woodland. ‘Come, Jack, and see something that God certainly made, and man—spoiler though he may be—has not succeeded in spoiling. What a delicious evening, and what a gush of song from that nightingale in the old thorn tree! “*Hic sæpe Faunorum voces exauditæ, sæpe formæ visæ deorum.*” Such an evening as this preaches one a good sermon, does it not? a better one perhaps than the sights of horror of which you have been telling us.’

Hillyard laid his hand kindly on Jack’s shoulder and led him out upon the lawn, and then went back to Sir Adrian, who loved a chat over his claret.

Jack went in to his mother through the drawing-room window.

‘How excited you look, dear!’ she said,

stroking his forehead and pushing away his hair, which was tumbling about it. ‘What have you been quarrelling about—politics?’

‘Listen to this, mother,’ said Jack, taking up a volume which lay on the table and looking for the place he wanted. ‘This is what we have been quarrelling about,’ and then he read: ““Who does not know the temper of the man of the world, that worst enemy of the world? His inexhaustible patience of abuses that only torment others; his apologetic word for beliefs that may, perhaps, not be so precisely true as one might wish, and institutions which are not altogether so useful as one might think possible; his cordiality towards progress and improvement in a general way and his coldness or antipathy to each progressive proposal in particular; his pigmy hope that life will one day become somewhat better, punily shivering by the side of his gigantic conviction that it might well be infinitely worse?” That is

good, is it not? Father and Mr. Hillyard are just deciding over their claret that Shoreditch might easily be a great deal grimier than I found it, and that the Shoreditch needlewomen on sixpence a day have every reason to be well content. I came away because I felt in such a rage: when you find parsons defending the infamies of the world it makes one hate the very name of religion.'

'Hush, Jack,' said his mother, 'you don't really mean that, I'm sure. Irreligion, I have just been reading, is the elder sister of revolution.'

'I should think none the worse of it for that,' said Jack. Presently the two gentlemen appeared and summoned Jack and his mother to their evening rubber.

Be Jack's opinions what they might, it had become necessary to provide him with an employment in life.

'If you like to go into orders, Jack,' his father had once said, 'you could have Hunts-

ham some day. Poor old Porter will soon be going ; he is getting very infirm.'

' Not for the world, father, thank you,' cried Jack. ' If I went into orders at all I should be an East End curate ; but I cannot. That is not my vocation ; though I should like it in many ways—missionary work among the worst sort of savages, home-grown ones ; but I cannot.'

This was not the view in which the Church presented itself to Sir Adrian, to whom one of its functions seemed to be the providing a respectable sphere for such members of the landed classes as were not eldest sons and chose to adopt an unambitious career. It mattered the less, because it was now clear that neither as a country rector nor as an East End curate would Jack put on the Churchman's frock.

But then what was to be done with him ? Sir Adrian's vague notions that something could be found for him in London faded to a

dreary blank when they were brought to the test of practical realisation. He consulted Mr. Graves, and that gentleman's advice—exact, business-like, matter of fact—was the reverse of encouraging. The Bar was, as Sir Adrian well knew, a long, expensive, and hazardous experiment. Jack was too old for the army, not studious enough for the Civil Service.

On the whole, Mr. Graves thought that Valentine's influence in the City was the likeliest chance. He might find an opening for him, or, at any rate, a useful training.

Lady Eugenia had entreated her husband not to quarrel with his brother. The wisdom of her advice was now apparent. Nothing would induce Sir Adrian to write to Valentine again; nor would it be proper that he should. Then Lady Eugenia, who would have stripped the clothes off her back for her darling son, put her pride in her pocket, and, without informing Sir Adrian of what she

was about, wrote to Valentine a quiet, dignified letter. ‘Would Valentine forget their quarrel and help Jack and his parents in this grave emergency?’ It is good policy to confer favours which cost one nothing, and agreeable to put oneself conspicuously in the right. Valentine was influenced by both considerations. Nor did he harbour any real bitterness against his brother, except the latent resentment that a successful man naturally feels at failure, and a shrewd man at bungling. He was haunted by scruples, to which his wife was a stranger. He cared, indeed, first of all for himself, his own success, his wife, his child; but he cared also for his childhood’s home, the companion of his boyhood, his family name. Mrs. Valentine regarded her brother-in-law’s reverses with indifference, if not actual satisfaction. Steel his heart as he would, Valentine could not think of them without a pang.

So Valentine answered Lady Eugenia’s

request with a gracious alacrity that did credit to his brotherly affection. He had forgiven Adrian's angry speeches, and was only anxious to give what help he could. He knew of nothing at the moment which was likely to answer, but he would think it over. Eugenia should hear from him shortly again. Meanwhile he would do his best, and was her affectionate brother.

Lady Eugenia took this small modicum of comfort for what it was worth, and did not think it necessary to make her husband participate in what might, after all, prove only a treacherous hope. She answered Valentine effusively. 'You have behaved generously,' she wrote; 'you know our troubles and difficulties. They have brought us very low. I am in despair about Jack's future. Dear Valentine, you can save him, and I believe you will. Meanwhile you have earned a troubled woman's gratitude.'

Valentine was as good as his word. It

was a point of honour with him. He felt a little fondness for Adrian, a little chivalry for Lady Eugenia, a little liking for Jack, a great deal of regard for his own reputation for efficiency. He was bound to succeed, even when success concerned such unimportant persons as his own relations. He cast the matter over in his mind—he inquired right and left—he kept his eyes open.

Before many weeks the opportunity, which generally comes to the alert observer, presented itself. Among Valentine's City acquaintances were a firm of brewers, who were doing a good solid business in beer and public-houses. Rudge Brothers had an account at one of Valentine's banks, and he had, accordingly, the best information as to their resources, their wants, their prospects. They were shrewd, pushing, ambitious; resolved to make a fortune and on the high road to do so. They turned their capital to excellent account, and saw

numerous directions in which more capital might be profitably employed. They were not, it had to be acknowledged, quite gentlemen ; but they were in process of becoming gentlemen, and meanwhile were quite near enough the mark for business purposes. They would be tempted by the idea of a prospective baronet and a county connection. They would like an alliance with Valentine. Jack might be turned to some account as a partner, and a few thousand pounds could surely be raised from the collapse of Hunts-ham for him to take into the concern. Jack was a good fellow, a pleasant companion, popular in society, an undeniably gentleman —would, no doubt, make an excellent brewer. Valentine broached the subject delicately to the Rudges, and felt his way. His overtures were well received. The additional capital was scarcely a consideration ; still a few thousand pounds are always something. But the connection was desirable, and the firm

was exactly at the stage when its desirability would be most acutely felt. After some days of negotiation Valentine was able to inform Lady Eugenia that an arrangement, in every way satisfactory, was open to Jack's acceptance, and that, if the disentailing of Hunts-ham would set £5000 at liberty, Jack might be provided with a pleasant berth in an excellent business, where he might reasonably hope to make, at any rate, an ample competence, and might become a rich man.

Pleased with the success of his diplomacy, Valentine wrote with real good nature and satisfaction at having been able to do the family so good a turn. Lady Eugenia gave a sigh of relief and congratulated herself on a practical achievement.

A ray of light had at last broken through the murky sky under which she generally lived.

CHAPTER XI

LADY HERIOT PREPARES FOR ACTION

‘Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.’

IF there was one thing more than another which shook Lady Heriot’s confidence in Mr. Graves, it was his persistent champion-
ship of Sir Adrian. Even the execution at Huntsham failed to rouse him to any proper pitch of indignation, if indeed Mr. Graves’s mood could be reasonably held to deserve so respectable a name as indignation. He was indignant, indeed ; not, however, like Lady Heriot, with Sir Adrian, but with those who had so unnecessarily set the machinery of the law in motion to harass him. ‘It is too

bad of Mortimers' people,' he said ; ' a great deal too bad ; and too bad of the Huntsford Bank. They knew perfectly well that the money was safe ; they knew that I was acting for Sir Adrian, and they never gave me a hint. It is some political grudge, I am convinced. Mortimers, you know, were Mr. Goldingham's agents at the last election. It is too bad, too bad : an honourable high-minded gentleman like Sir Adrian ! There is really nothing that men will not do to indulge a political grudge.'

This view of the subject did not much accord with Lady Heriot's present feelings about it ; nor did it gratify her to have Sir Adrian's misdeeds so generously extenuated. ' I really cannot see it in that light,' she said ; ' people have a right to get their bills paid, I suppose, somehow or other, by fair means or foul——'

' But not by such foul means as this,' said Mr. Graves. ' It was a low manœuvre.'

' You can never see any harm in Adrian,

can you, Mr. Graves?' Lady Heriot said, unable to repress a rising feeling of irritation. 'Well, you have not had to pay his bills as often as I have.'

'Sir Adrian has been unwise in some of his speculations, I admit,' said the solicitor; 'unwise, perhaps, in speculating at all. All the same, if he had not, I do not see how he could have paid his way. His rental is less than half his father's. He has very heavy charges, bequeathed to him by others; and these, unluckily, do not diminish with his rental. It was natural for him to try to increase his income: it was excusable, it was imperative. Even a wise man is bound sometimes to run a risk.'

'If I ever wished to alter the disposition which I have made of my property,' asked Lady Heriot, breaking away from a distasteful topic, and coming somewhat abruptly to the business which she had at heart, 'how ought it to be done?'

Mr. Graves was startled. Such a change in Lady Heriot's intentions was a contingency which had never till now suggested itself. He had presence of mind, however, to conceal his surprise. 'It could be done by a codicil,' he said, 'like that which your ladyship will remember having executed some years ago, when you altered some of the legacies. But such a change would require a great deal of consideration, would it not?'

'I have given much consideration to it,' said Lady Heriot with decision, 'and am giving it. I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that it may be my duty to save the bulk of the property—such of it as Sir Adrian has not squandered—by leaving it to his brother. I should wish to have a codicil drawn which will effect that, in case I should ever decide upon doing it.'

Mr. Graves stood absolutely aghast. 'Your ladyship will not forget, I am sure,' he said—

'I would rather not discuss it just now,'

said Lady Heriot; ‘I am not strong enough to-day. I have decided upon nothing. But I see plainly that it may be right for me to take this course, and I wish to be prepared for it. The legacies may remain as they are; but have the codicil so drawn, if you please, that the rest of the property may go to Valentine instead of his brother. How must it be executed?’

‘The formalities of execution are the same as those for a will,’ said Mr. Graves, by this time growing decidedly stiffer in manner. ‘The codicil must be signed in the presence of two witnesses, both present at the same time; and each of them must sign their attestation in presence of the other. But I shall come myself, of course, and see that everything is right and in due form. Any mistake about a will is often the ruin of a family—the ruin, at any rate, of its happiness. We see such things, unhappily, only too often in my profession.’

'I can well imagine it,' said Lady Heriot, more and more determined not to let Mr. Graves's scruples stand in the way of her intentions, whatever they might be. 'Nevertheless it will be a satisfaction to me to have such a codicil ready and at hand, in case I wish to use it. Will you have it prepared and send it to me?'

Mr. Graves left his old friend with a heavy heart and apprehensive of disaster. Lady Heriot was evidently contemplating some foolish act, and was clearing the field of those who would oppose her folly. She was just at that stage of bodily weakness at which infirmities of temper and judgment are likeliest to reveal themselves; and she was shaking off her advisers. It was not easy to see how she could be helped. So thought Mr. Graves as he walked homeward, in anxious thought immersed, striving in vain to see his way to any hopeful solution.

Lady Heriot felt a quiet exultation in

having courageously confronted Mr. Graves. She was, at heart, afraid of him—of his keen insight, his impartiality, his staunch good sense. He had his views—clear and decided—as to what she ought to do, and they clashed with her own inclinations. It was a relief to be now completely mistress of the situation and free to do what she pleased without the troublesome constraint of unfavourable criticism. What she meant to do she had not yet decided, except that it should be exactly what she chose, not what other folks bothered her into doing.

It was perhaps Lady Heriot's satisfaction at the achievement that made her especially bright amid her guests that night. She was having a little dinner in honour of Olivia, who was afterwards to make her *début*, under Mrs. Hazelden's protection, in a London ball-room. The occasion was exciting, for the beautiful dress which Lady Heriot had ordered, and which Madame Celestine sent

home only just in time for dinner, proved indeed an ambrosial affair. Madame Celestine had recognised her opportunity for a striking effect, and had done her best to deck the beautiful *débutante* with artistic simplicity. Olivia surprised herself, Mrs. Phillips, who presided on the occasion at her toilette, and Lady Heriot—who criticised the result—by a new access of loveliness. The dress was, all acknowledged, a masterpiece; but how easily are such masterpieces constructed for young creatures like Olivia! Lady Heriot had sent for her to come and be inspected before she went downstairs. Olivia found her resting in an arm-chair, in anticipation of the fatigues of the evening.

‘Charming!’ she cried, as Olivia came and stood before her.

‘It is so good of you,’ cried the blushing Olivia, giving her kind patroness a filial kiss. ‘My dress is too lovely—I feel a great deal too fine in it.’

But another delightful surprise was still to come. ‘I want you,’ Lady Heriot said, ‘to have a little remembrance of your visit to me. I shall remember it with pleasure. You have worked hard for me, I am sure, and I wish you to feel an old woman’s gratitude. Give me the string of pearls, Phillips. Put it on, dear, and go to the glass and see how you like yourself with a necklace.’

When they got downstairs they found that Dr. Crucible had already arrived in charge of a fine bouquet, which, in an unprecedented fit of gallantry, he had ordered from Covent Garden as his contribution to the splendour of the occasion.

Olivia, whose attire till now had been of a rustic and juvenile simplicity, was conscious of feeling extremely over-dressed. It was a comfort when Mrs. Valentine arrived in attire whose magnificence completely eclipsed Olivia, and gave her a reassuring sensation of

insignificance. After the Valentines came Lord Melrose, and, close upon him, Mrs. Hazelden, who was to be Olivia's guardian through the eventful evening.

'We will not wait for Mr. de Renzi,' Lady Heriot said. 'He has written to say that he may be kept at the House. He has to make a speech this evening, and must get it over before he comes away. He is to come when he can; so, my dear Olivia, you will have to go down to dinner by yourself.'

Stonehouse brought them the latest news from the House; he had come straight from the debate. De Renzi had spoken admirably.

'There had been nothing so brilliant among the younger men this session,' he said; 'I heard Mr. Grandiose congratulating him. He is a real acquisition to his party—to the House.'

In the midst of this panegyric De Renzi arrived, with the flush of triumph full upon him. Olivia felt it very impressive to meet

at close quarters one who had just been experiencing a parliamentary success; but De Renzi wore his honours with pleasant modesty. He was quite at his ease, and at once put Olivia at ease by a reassuring air of intimacy. He was the friend of the family, and bent—like the rest of Lady Heriot's friends—on providing Olivia with amusement. She should be well amused. Commonplace, ceremony, tedium, were for the uninteresting world of outsiders. De Renzi was in the highest spirits, and his high spirits were delightfully infectious.

‘I am so glad that I managed to get away,’ he said, ‘though I did not know the honour that Lady Heriot destined for me. We have had such an afternoon, such an awful afternoon, on the Old Swamp Reclamation Bill. It is the Serbonian bog of modern times, where armies whole have sunk—armies of debaters with batteries of blue-books. Thank Heaven it is over. Now we will enjoy ourselves.’

'For me,' said Olivia, 'it is amusement enough to sit next a Member of Parliament who has just been making a speech. You can hardly believe, I suppose, that I have never heard one.'

'No?' said De Renzi. 'Let me advise you never to do so. No one ever quite recovers his spirits again who has been through a debate, the worst known form of human dreariness. You would lose your freshness, which would be such a misfortune.'

'Should I?' said Olivia. 'Well, my freshness, which means my country simplicity, I suppose, must take care of itself. I want to see the world.'

'The world will be delighted to see you, I am sure,' said her companion. 'What bit of it do you propose to look at first?'

'To-night,' answered Olivia, 'I am going to a ball—a very grand ball. Mrs. Hazelden is going to take me.'

'Ah,' said De Renzi. 'Mrs. Beaumont's,

of course. That will be an experience. I wish I could be there; but I am bound by the most awful vows to be back at the House by half-past ten. I dare not break them, even for you or Mrs. Beaumont.'

'What a pity!' said Olivia. 'Have you to make another speech?'

'Heaven forbid!' cried De Renzi. 'I have contributed my share of dulness for to-day.'

'Dull!' cried Olivia. 'But how can it be dull? Mr. Stonehouse was saying, when you came in, that your speech had been excessively brilliant.'

'See how people deceive themselves!' cried De Renzi. 'Stonehouse himself is the wreck of an amusing character, the ruins of a wit! Nothing of him remains but an occasional epigram. But how delightful for you to know nothing about it—to be so unsophisticated. Do you know nothing, then?'

'Nothing,' said Olivia, 'except Homer and

Virgil, which I have read with my father. And now I have begun Dante.'

'Perfection!' cried her companion—'an ideal education; three masterpieces, and the rest a blank for fancy to play at large in! If only we could all be educated like that! What a world it would be!'

'A dull one!' said Olivia. 'I have found that out already; there are a thousand things that I am dying to know about.'

'A mistake,' said De Renzi, 'as old as our first mother! Be warned by her. Feminine craving for information was the ruin of mankind, and is so still. Ignorance, some philosopher has said, is bliss. How true! If only we could attain it! And so you really can do nothing?'

'Nothing,' said Olivia, 'except play the piano a little,—not that it deserves the name of playing. I know enough to know that.'

'You love music, then?' asked her companion.

'I do,' said Olivia, 'with all my heart. It is my chief delight at home. It has been one of my great pleasures in London. Mrs. Hazelden has taken me to several enchanting concerts. But all music delights me. There is a beautiful German band which comes into Seymour Street on Thursdays. Even the barrel-organs are an immense pleasure. Do you like them?'

'No,' said De Renzi. 'I am never merry when I hear street music, as somebody or other says in Shakespeare, I believe; but before I became a political star I was beginning a musical education, and devoted myself to the violoncello. But what sort of music do you play?'

'I?' said Olivia. 'Only some slow movements of Beethoven, and some airs of Schubert and Chopin that Lady Heriot likes to fall asleep to.'

'Happy Lady Heriot!' cried De Renzi. 'A narcotic worthy of gods! What blissful

slumbers they must be—like Endymion's, “full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing,” and ended only by a kiss from the moon. That would be the way that one would like to go to sleep, lulled by the Graces instead of being stupefied by boredom! I am a wretched sleeper. Even in the House I can scarcely get a nap. You must play me to sleep some day, like Lady Heriot; will you?’

‘With pleasure,’ said Olivia, beaming upon her companion with mirthful eyes: ‘you can have the other sofa. I can do both of you at once.’

‘That will be delightful,’ said De Renzi; ‘but I am so interested in your case. It is like that of the charming girl in the *Golden Butterfly*, who had been brought up in the proper way, and been kept perfectly ignorant, just as you have been. How delightful it must be not to be able to read or write!’

‘But, unfortunately,’ said Olivia, ‘I *can*

read and write. I forgot to mention that. All the little children in the national schools get as far as that.'

'Yes,' said De Renzi, 'and so lose all their poetry! You spoil a peasant when you teach him how to read. How incongruous, how unnatural, how inartistic! What does he want to read for, when he is happy in the fields? Who can tell what he will read? Very likely some horrid revolutionary newspaper.'

'Well,' said Olivia, 'I always read the *Times* to Lady Heriot after breakfast. That is how I came to know about your speeches in Parliament; but I thought the idea was that everybody should be educated.'

'The idea!' cried De Renzi; 'yes, it is one of the radical cries which obliges the Tories to outcry them. That is why we are all going to the dogs on a stream of national enlightenment.'

'What heresy are you propounding, Mr. de Renzi?' said Lady Heriot.

'No heresy, Lady Heriot,' said De Renzi, 'but the orthodox doctrine of contented ignorance. Great men can do without knowledge; petty men only become pettier by being crammed with more than they are meant to hold. Lord Chatham, you remember, knew nothing but Spenser's *Faery Queen*.'

'Which we none of us know nowadays,' said Stonehouse; 'but a prig has been, I think, defined as a person who has been overfed with intellectual provender.'

'That accounts for our all being such prigs,' said Lord Melrose. 'They cram us too much; one of George Eliot's wisest observations is that you only make a man's ignorance denser by starching it with facts.'

'And,' said De Renzi, 'when the starch is made out of parliamentary statistics, how dense does ignorance become!'

When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room De Renzi dexterously took possession of a chair which secured him

a few moments' talk with Olivia. 'It is too tiresome,' he said; 'I am obliged to go. But we shall meet again before long. I am coming to Mrs. Beaumont's after all. I shall get into dire disgrace. You must reward me with a valse.'

CHAPTER XII

AN OLD LADY'S SERMON

‘A man, who can
Live to be old, and still a man ;
Whose latest and most leaden hours
Fall with soft wings, stuck with soft flowers ;
And when life’s short fable ends,
Soul and body part as friends ;
No quarrels, murmurs, no delay ;
A kiss, a sigh,—and so, away.’

THE hours of Olivia’s holiday were numbered. Her father had returned from Huntsham, and, in his lonely home, was missing her sorely. Pleasure apart, Olivia’s presence at the Rectory was essential to the maintenance of such order as prevailed there. The family accounts would, she knew, in her absence soon become chaotic. Some village festivities needed her inspiring genius and controlling

hand. Her father was quite incapable of carrying on his parish work without her aid. Olivia began to detect, or to imagine that she detected, some sub-tones of melancholy in his letters. She knew instinctively that he was wanting her. She confided her suspicions to Lady Heriot, and Lady Heriot, without an instant's hesitation, decided that she ought to go. It was a characteristic of her habitual unselfishness that, when once she learnt how matters stood, she breathed no hint of regret that Olivia's visit could not be prolonged. Yet she would fain have prolonged it. Olivia was daily becoming more necessary to her. She was in need of companionship, and Olivia was excellent company. Her ministrations added greatly to the elder lady's enjoyment. Congeniality is what invalids prize in those who are about them, and Lady Heriot found Olivia extremely congenial. Her movements, her tones, her way of doing things—her way of

talking and feeling about things — all were soothing to the sufferer's nerves. She amused, she interested, she touched her. It was not always that Lady Heriot felt up to having Mrs. Valentine, or even her own daughter, Lydia Hazelden, to stir the tranquillity of her chamber: nor were they always to be had. Both were busy women, in the full flow of life. Mrs. Hazelden had a family of boys and girls, whose souls and bodies left their mother little leisure for any other care. Isabella found the claims of society, each year, more imperative, more absorbing. Olivia could see that Lady Heriot was fatigued by her daughter-in-law's bustle and gossip, and tried in vain to assume an interest in matters which were becoming too remote from her invalid life and her real thoughts to be any longer interesting. It was natural, of course, that a young woman with Isabella's tastes should enjoy the world and the amusements which fortune brought

within her reach. It did not follow that other people should care about them as much as she did, or that Isabella's somewhat noisy chatter should prove a good specific on afternoons when Lady Heriot's spirits were clouded, her head aching, her vital powers sinking low. Mrs. Valentine, too, made no secret to Olivia that she regarded her visit to Lady Heriot in the light of a holiday for herself—a welcome respite from distasteful duties. It was a duty to attend on her mother-in-law, and one which she dared not neglect ; but it was a relief to perform it by proxy.

‘ Nature never intended me for a nurse,’ she one day told Olivia. ‘ I do not feel compassionate to people just because they happen to be old or ill. *They* ought to be compassionate to us who have to attend to them. You are a perfect little adept at it, and have a genius for nursing. You ought to be a sister of mercy, my dear ; you would

make a charming nun. But for me, I confess to you, an invalid's room is a chamber of horrors! Pouff! It stifles me to think of it. And invalids! How exacting they are! how full of troublesome whims! How can they expect one not to dislike them? For me, I love what is lovable—light, beauty, pretty colours, pretty forms, pretty faces. I love them. I want as much of them as I can get. But nursing! My dear Olivia, stay as long as ever you can, like a good girl, and earn my eternal gratitude.'

The Fates had decreed, however, that Olivia's visit should end. Lady Heriot had already arranged for her journey home. There was nothing now to be said.

None the less did the approaching departure throw a tinge of melancholy over the intercourse of these two friends. Olivia was grieved to leave a void which she was conscious no one else could fill. Should she ever return to fill it? There was a feeling

of everything being for the last time. The end was coming, was near ; each week did its work. Even during Olivia's visit Lady Heriot's powers had seemed to ebb. The sands were running out, and running fast. The morning after the ball she was especially feeble. She had slept ill — she was in pain.

'I fear,' she said to Olivia, 'that I must give up having dinner-parties. They are too much for me, even little ones like yesterday's, and with my dear Olivia to help. But now tell me about the ball.'

'It was an immense crowd,' said Olivia ; 'a crowd of strangers, which is a strong form of loneliness. But what a splendid sight ! The flowers were exquisite, though it seemed sacrilege to put them to perish in a mob. There were many beautiful ladies : it was a pleasure to look at them. Mr. de Renzi came and took me down to supper, and afterwards helped us to get away.'

'And you enjoyed it?' asked Lady Heriot.

'Yes,' said Olivia; 'it was my first experience. It was all new to me—my beautiful new dress, and the lovely pearls among the rest. I have not thanked you for them half enough, Lady Heriot, for this and a thousand other kindnesses. You have been very good to me.'

'Well, Olivia,' said Lady Heriot, 'grieved as I am to lose you, I am glad in some ways that you are going home. You will be safer with your father—safer and happier.'

'I have been very happy here,' said Olivia; 'you have given me many pleasures. But safe? Can I be safer than with you?'

'Yes,' said her companion; 'more out of harm's way. Your life at home is the proper sort of life to lead—a life of tranquillity, refinement, pure and healthy joys, simple pleasures.'

‘But,’ said Olivia, ‘you have loved society, Lady Heriot, have you not?’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Heriot; ‘well, perhaps too well. I am an old woman now, and see things otherwise than I did when I was a young and foolish one. There is a nice saying of George Sand’s that I am fond of. “When we grow old,” she says, “and reach the sunset of life—the finest hour for tones and harmonies of colour—we form new ideas of everything, and above all, of affection.” Young eyes are so dazzled with the bright things in life that they sometimes fail to see that affection is the only thing really worth caring about.’

‘I feel a great affection for you,’ said Olivia, ‘and I care about yours, next to my father’s, more, I believe, than about anything in the world.’

Lady Heriot sat holding Olivia’s hand, and looking at her with kindly wistful eyes, as if trying to read her future.

'You are a good girl, Olivia, and have a warm heart, a tender heart, a rare possession nowadays, I can tell you. I am always so afraid that you should get it hurt. Many women have lumps of ice which do duty for hearts. They are dangerous folk for sensitive natures who cross their path. One has to beware of them.'

'You want to say something to me, Lady Heriot, I can see,' said Olivia.

'Yes,' said her companion, 'I do. I have it on my conscience to give you some advice. I feel a great interest in you. I should like to see you happy, dear Olivia, before I die. I should like to protect you from unhappiness. I wish that I could. But, who knows how long I shall be alive? You will be beset with dangers. There are people who ignore all the precious things of life. They try to make young women ignore them; they laugh them to scorn, for they have ceased to believe in them. You may be tried, you may be

tempted. Olivia, take an old friend's advice—one who has seen life and knows the world—and don't let them persuade you; don't let them deceive you. Numbers of girls are sold that way; be not you of that unhappy number. They will try to sell you. There will be plenty of bidders. Some one will want to buy your sweet eyes. Isabella will put them up to the biggest bidder. Do not be bought at any price. Marry the man you love, and, till he comes—and he will come in all due time—turn a deaf ear to all that others say, to all that others can offer. The worst way of preparing for the journey of life, believe me, is to link yourself to a companion whom you are not certain of loving.'

'I hope that I may never do that,' said Olivia. 'Why should you think it likely, Lady Heriot?'

'You will be tempted, Olivia; I am positive of it. You have the art to charm, my child, the dangerous, sometimes the fatal art.

You cannot help yourself. You will be admired; you will be flattered, and flattery is a most intoxicating drink for young heads, and indeed for old ones. You will be beset by those who are thinking only—who can think only—for themselves, who have much to offer, who will bid high with money, influence, prestige, all the good things of life. How is a poor young creature to know the real worth of those who want her to embellish their world, who want to buy her? It must be no question of buying, my dear. Some good man will come and offer you his heart and claim yours in return, and then you will be a happy woman.'

Olivia got up and kissed Lady Heriot's forehead.

'Forgive me for preaching you a sermon,' Lady Heriot went on, 'I may not have an opportunity of preaching you another. Young people, whom I love, starting in their fragile skiffs on a perilous sea, fill me with a sort of

anxious terror. Shipwreck is so easy—your precious freight so soon tossed overboard in despair. And what that means to feeling souls !'

'The world seems a dangerous place,' said Olivia. 'I like looking at it in safety from your drawing-room windows or my father's study. I am sure at any rate that I love him and I love you. At present I am safe.'

But was she safe? or was she carrying with her to her quiet home the germ of that which would one day stir her being to its lowest depths, and shake the fair fabric of her life's happiness with mortal shock?

It was unfortunate that, next day, when De Renzi called, Lady Heriot was not well enough to be at home. Olivia felt it a sort of blank to have missed his visit. It would, she confessed to herself, be a great mortification if the Fates had decreed that she should leave London without seeing her brilliant companion once again.

CHAPTER XIII

A YOUNG MAN'S SPORT

'He understood the worth of womankind,
To furnish men, provisionally, sport—
Sport transitive ;—such earth's amusements are ;
But, seeing that amusements pall by use,
Variety therein is requisite ;
And, since the serious work of life were wronged,
Should we bestow importance on our play,
It follows, in such womankind-pursuit,
Cheating is lawful chase.'

THE Fates, however, were not in the habit of decreeing what De Renzi did not like. Next day there came a polite note from him to Lady Heriot, announcing that he had a box at the opera, and would be highly honoured if Miss Hillyard and Mrs. Valentine Heriot would occupy it, and come, on their way home, to a little supper at his house. The

Backhouses were to be there, and Dr. Crucible. Mrs. Valentine had already accepted. It remained only for Lady Heriot and Olivia to give their consent. For once Lady Heriot looked, Olivia could perceive, disconcerted at a proposal for her amusement. She was, in truth, beginning to feel alarmed for her *protégée's* safety. She had preached her sermon, but on what heedless ears do such sermons fall! A danger which Lady Heriot, in proposing Olivia's visit, had never reckoned as within the realm of possibility, was beginning to shape itself with disagreeable distinctness. It was the danger of De Renzi. The chances were a million to one against De Renzi and Olivia forming any but the most superficial acquaintance. They were whole hemispheres apart in tastes, habits, ways of thought. They belonged to worlds as different as though Olivia had dropped from another planet. They might—they would, if they met—amuse each other by complete

diversity of nature and circumstance, by force of contrast, by the remoteness of each other's ideas. And they might do so with safety. Anything beyond amusement was inconceivable.

So Lady Heriot, on prudent thoughts intent, had ordained. So, according to every rule of probability, events should have fallen out. Nothing, however, where human beings are concerned, is so likely as the improbable, the inconceivable. De Renzi falsified every calculation. His predilection for Olivia was unmistakable. At Lady Heriot's dinner-party he had devoted himself to amusing her; he had made his way to her for a *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room: he had avowedly deserted the House for her sake, and, contrary to all his habits, had made his appearance at a ball. Those flattering attentions could not, of course, have been without their effect on an impressible girl. Olivia, Lady Heriot could see, was impressed; how much,

how little, none could tell ; but more, it was to be feared, than was desirable for her peace of mind. Her reticence about De Renzi—the guarded language in which she spoke about him, when contrasted with the usual frankness of her utterances—implied that there was something that she cared not to avow. The suspicion was alarming. Lady Heriot reproached herself for having allowed the opportunity of their acquaintance. But how vain is such self-reproach, when the mischief is, perhaps, already done !

Nor was De Renzi the only danger. The conviction had begun to be borne in on Lady Heriot that Mrs. Valentine had designs upon Olivia. Either she wanted to annex her for her own purposes, or she was desirous of turning De Renzi's partiality to serious account. Either alternative was alarming. To what risks, in such a woman's hands, was not Olivia's happiness exposed !

Thus De Renzi's invitation was anything

but welcome. None the less it could not well be escaped. Mrs. Valentine had set her heart upon it, and would not be foiled. Lady Heriot was in the feeble condition to which the prospect of a conflict of wills is terrible. Besides, opposition would attract attention, and only emphasise matters which it was, above everything, desirable to leave in obscurity.

Lady Heriot felt the situation to be full of anxiety. It was a comfort to reflect that the period of peril was nearly at its close. In another week Olivia would be beyond the reach both of De Renzi's and Mrs. Valentine's dangerous influences—safe once again in the quiet of her father's house. If only she could read Olivia's thoughts and assure herself that no harm had as yet been effected!

Meanwhile, how did matters stand with Olivia? How do matters stand with a young girl when she first discovers that she wields

a spell which stronger natures than her own obey—which makes her a force among her fellow-mortals—when she knows that she is no longer insignificant—when it dawns upon her that some one admires her, delights in her, finds in her something more charming than in others ?

It was, Olivia felt, a disturbing revelation. A new world had suddenly opened upon her, full of exciting possibilities. She felt powerless to resist De Renzi, but not powerless to charm him. He had, again and again, obliged her to recognise this soul-stirring fact. Their talk at the ball, short as it had been, was long enough for this. He was there for her. And he was very impressive. Never before had Olivia met any one so brilliant, so audacious, so much the incarnation of success. He seemed to go through life in a sort of triumph, treading on roses and dewy meads, on the prostrate forms of fallen foes, with light, joyous, indifferent

step. Some men are born to good fortune. Some are born hewers of wood and drawers of water—the useful, patient, unaspiring toilers of existence. Nature, it may be hoped, adapts them to their lot. A favoured few are born to ride on the toilers' shoulders, to coin pleasure, amusement, distinction out of their obscure labours. De Renzi took it for granted that he was one of these—foremost among the lucky ones. For him riches, pleasure, delights of eye and ear and taste, the rapture of gratified ambition, the joy of successful achievement. This spoilt child of fortune it was who was now owning Olivia's spell, consulting her every wish, devising pretexts to meet her, inviting her to consider him at her disposal—the eager ministrant to her enjoyment. The idea was bewildering. Bewildering, too, was De Renzi's little banquet. Olivia had never seen luxury before—had never, certainly, seen so many beautiful things as crowded

upon her sight in De Renzi's drawing-room. Old Lady Heriot would have been scandalised at its profusion; but De Renzi's profusion was at any rate judicious and refined. The books, the pictures, the etchings, the curiosities—if too abundant for some tastes—were all of the rarest. Flowers, fresh and exquisite, filled every available space. An open piano proclaimed that music had here some recent devotee. Mrs. Backhouse flitted from one pretty object to another with fresh exclamations of delight.

'Sybarite!' she cried, as De Renzi followed her about doing the honours of the occasion and the place; 'this then is how a bachelor makes shift to live.'

'Bachelors,' said De Renzi, 'can hardly be said to live. They hope for life. Tonight, for a brief moment, my hopes are realised.'

The party was a small one. Dr. Crucible had been invited as a friend of Olivia, and

was now deep with Mr. Cosmo over a rare copy of Boccaccio, one of the last of De Renzi's acquisitions. 'You will like to know Cosmo,' De Renzi had said to Olivia, 'one of the greatest connoisseurs in Europe, and a famous collector. We will make him show us his cabinets some day. Meantime he is a curiosity himself. Ah, there is supper! Come, Mrs. Heriot, let us lead the way.'

Cosmo came up and took charge of Olivia, and placed her next their host. Mrs. Backhouse followed with Dr. Crucible. Her husband, Valentine Heriot, and one or two more men brought up the procession.

De Renzi was in the highest spirits, and played his part of host with animation. 'I hope that everybody is hungry,' he cried. 'The opera always makes me ravenous.'

'For my part,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'I am far too overwrought to be hungry. I don't think I shall go to *Faust* again; it distresses one. Marguerite haunts me. The

jewel scene is a sort of sermon against vanity, and I am conscious of being disgracefully vain. I believe I should sell my soul for a pretty necklace if I had the chance.'

'Fortunately,' said De Renzi, 'there is no need for any such transaction. Backhouse keeps you too well supplied. Your sapphires to-night would justify any crime.'

'And how nice,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'to have them for nothing.'

'For nothing!' cried her husband; 'I like that.'

'A husband's homage counts for nothing,' said Cosmo.

'But what a *recherché* supper!' cried Mrs. Backhouse, studying the menu. 'Half a dozen delectable curiosities of which I never heard. It will enrich my imagination and my cook's. I am devoted to fine cooking. It is an art we women have to study. Husbands must be fed. Mine is dreadfully particular.'

'Of course,' said Cosmo. 'A woman's sovereignty begins in the kitchen, and to be complete it must be intelligent. To govern the man you must feed him scientifically.'

'But it would never do to feed one's husband with such suppers as this too often, would it?' asked Mrs. Backhouse. 'Nor do I like the idea of feeding men with a purpose. It sounds as if they were a sort of wild beasts.'

'But what submissive ones!' said Cosmo. 'Man is ahead of the other animals because he got tamed the first—by woman. "Beauty," we read in Pope, "draws us by a single hair."'

'It depends upon whose hair it is,' said Mrs. Heriot, 'and which way it wants to draw one. Some women are empresses everywhere but in their own homes.'

'But then some husbands are so unsympathetic,' said Mrs. Backhouse with a sweet smile, 'and so unimpressible! One cannot

think how they persuaded their wives to marry them.'

'I have read,' said Crucible, 'that women's faculty for making incongruous marriages is the corner-stone of civilisation. It preserves the social equilibrium.'

'I suppose,' said Mrs. Backhouse, 'that it is a law of nature; isn't it? But the laws of nature are so often bad ones. This is one of the worst, so far as women are concerned. It involves so much suffering. Just think what dull men girls marry!'

'But woman does not mind dulness,' said Cosmo, 'or any other form of martyrdom. In the East she submits to be locked up in a seraglio; in the West she unflinchingly obliterates herself in a bore.'

'Not unflinchingly,' said Mrs. Valentine; 'we have to make the best of an inferior sex. Bad is the best.'

'It is a beautiful provision,' said Crucible, 'to prevent society from becoming too bril-

lian. It is like the dark, defunct companion star, which occasionally obscures the splendid ones, like Sirius and Algol. They are the brightest of known creations, but some cold piece of opacity revolves about them, now diminishing their brilliancy, now shutting them off altogether from human ken. The husband's function is to eclipse the effulgence of the wife.'

'The occultation of Venus!' observed Cosmo; 'a curious phenomenon, with, no doubt, some useful purpose, if we only knew it.'

'How interesting!' cried Mrs. Backhouse. 'How delightful it must be to be scientific, like Dr. Crucible, and to explain human nature by the heavenly bodies! Do you know that I never heard of Algol and its attendant star before. For the future, when I am not shining in society, I shall know the cause.'

'Nothing,' said Cosmo, 'could eclipse Mrs. Backhouse, not even a husband.'

CHAPTER XIV

RETRO SATHANAS !

'The sun of youth
Has shone too straight upon his track, I know,
And fevered him with dreams of doing good
To good-for-nothing people.'

WHEN Lady Eugenia received Valentine's accommodating proposal it might have been thought that her anxieties about Jack's future were at an end. In the case of most women this would have been so: but then most women have not such a husband as Sir Adrian or such a son as Jack to reckon with. Sir Adrian had to be encountered first. Lady Eugenia looked forward to the interview with some flutterings of heart. He would, she knew only too well, raise every

conceivable objection, and some objections that were inconceivable. And so it proved. Sir Adrian was much aggrieved at negotiations having been opened with Valentine—his offending brother—without his sanction.

'But you never would have sanctioned it, Adrian,' pleaded his wife, 'if you had known.'

'That is just it,' said Sir Adrian; 'and now Valentine will, of course, imagine that I was too proud to ask a favour of him myself, but not too proud to let you do it for me, which is what I call mean. It is excessively annoying.'

'Please do not say that,' said his wife; 'unless you want to hurt me. We have quite troubles enough without your doing that. You know that Valentine will imagine nothing of the sort. He knows you too well. At any rate you must admit that the result is satisfactory.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said Sir Adrian.

‘What do we know about this precious brewery, and the men who are to be Jack’s partners? No doubt they own a lot of public-houses and gin-palaces. It is not the sort of thing which I fancy for my son. It will take a good deal to convince me that I ought to consent, if I ever do. After all, my consent is but half the battle, and the smaller half. I have a shrewd suspicion of what Jack will think about it. If he does not like it, my views about it will not signify. I will never urge him.’

‘I cannot conceive why he should object,’ said Lady Eugenia, ‘and I cannot think that he will.’

‘Well,’ said Sir Adrian, ‘try him.’

Try him Lady Eugenia did, with results that far more than confirmed her husband’s prognostications. Jack met his uncle’s proposal with an uncompromising opposition, which his mother knew by long experience that it was in vain to combat. Lady Eugenia

in her desperation betrayed more temper than Jack had ever seen in her before. She told him what trouble she had taken, what a stoop her pride had made, in order to secure him this good start in life. She was full of dismal apprehensions about their concerns, and especially about Jack's future. No doubt the plan was in some ways a descent, but everybody nowadays has to descend.

Then Jack, usually so dutiful and loving, and the pink of courtesy, flew out in a manner which his mother felt to be hardly short of brutal. 'I do not care about Uncle Val,' he said, 'or the people he consorts with. They are a bad lot, mother; I met a party of them at his house when I was in London, and was ashamed to see him, yes, and Aunt Isabella too, making up to them, beaming upon them, flattering them, actually flirting with them! Besides, no power upon earth would ever induce me to have anything to do with public-houses. I know too much about

them. Go into partnership with a brewer! Go into partnership with the devil. Ask any parson, any magistrate, any policeman, where all the sin and misery of England are hatched —the starving wives and children, the ruined homes, the workhouses, the jails. It is the publican's work, and the publican is the agent of the brewer! Parson, schoolmaster, and philanthropist struggle in vain to help the poor man while at every street corner there is temptation flaunted in his face to lure him to ruin. Come round the Shoreditch public-houses with me on a Saturday night and then ask me to earn a livelihood out of them if you can !'

' My dear Jack,' said his father, who came into the room during this tirade and listened to it with some secret satisfaction, ' what would you have? The Englishman must have his liquor, must he not? and liberty to drink it? The brewer cannot stop him any more than you or I can—any more than

I can stop the farmers boozing at the “ Heriot Arms ” in Huntsford.’

‘ The Englishman and his liberty ! ’ cried Jack ; ‘ the world is tired of them ! Liberty means something else than the right of knaves and ruffians to go to the bad whichever road they please, and take their luckless wives and children with them ! Such people’s liberty is their greatest curse.’

‘ You cannot force men into virtue,’ said Sir Adrian.

‘ No,’ said Jack ; ‘ but one need not tempt them into vice. One may help them towards good. Many men are trying. I wish to help them. At any rate I will not be found in the enemy’s camp. Why cant about it ? A flourishing brewery with its list of “ tied ” public-houses (how many have Rudge Brothers, I wonder ?) is the best contrived machine for the demoralisation of society the world has ever seen.’

‘ Well,’ said Lady Eugenia, who sat

trembling for the fate of her project, ‘I cannot see why, because bad people drink too much beer, good people may not drink it, and good people brew it. Some great brewers have been eminent for goodness.’

‘Ah!’ said Jack doggedly, ‘but I have no wish to share their eminence. I am content with obscurity.’

‘You will have to be content with something worse than obscurity,’ said his mother, holding desperately to her position. ‘How in the world are you to live if you refuse such an opening as this for a fantastic scruple? Surely what your uncle recommends and your father approves cannot be too bad for you to accept.’

‘I never said that I approved,’ said Sir Adrian. ‘I said that Jack must do as he thought right.’

Lady Eugenia’s last hope expired. It was cruel of her husband to turn against her. One other bolt remained. She now fired it.

'How are you ever to marry if you will not take your chances when they come? With this business of your uncle's you might have married when you pleased.'

Then Jack, whose wrath had been gathering, flew out in vehement outspokenness.

'You want to bribe me with Olivia, mother. That comes of my confession to you. I cannot change. I love her. I can love no other but her. I will marry no one if I cannot marry her. But I will not buy the chance of that by an act which I should loathe, which would make me despise myself for ever. I have done all that my father wished me. I have given up the woman I love. We do not know how I am to live. Well, I will take my chance: but live a life of shame I will not. Uncle Val's public-houses are declined with thanks! I am right, am I not, father?'

'I said that you must do as you thought right,' said Sir Adrian; 'and so you shall.

But remember, Jack, your promise to me about Olivia is more necessary now than ever.'

'There is no need to remind me of that, sir,' Jack said with some impatience; 'I remember it only too well.'

CHAPTER XV

'A NEW MISTRESS NOW I CHASE'

'Every gate is thronged with suitors, all the markets overflow :

I have but an angry fancy ; what is that which I should do ?'

JACK's rejection of the career suggested for him by his uncle was but one step, and an unsatisfactory one, towards solving the problem of what was to become of him. That question—ignore it as the Huntsham party might—recurred with disagreeable insistence. He was now of age, and the first use he had made of his majority had been to surrender home, fortune, and the pleasant prospects of a country gentleman's life.

His father had shown him the necessity :

that, unhappily, required but little demonstration. It was impossible for Sir Adrian, with an ever-diminishing income, to meet the charges of a heavily encumbered estate. Sir Adrian's efforts to improve matters had only enhanced the impossibility. Jack was generosity itself, and would not for a moment, even in thought, have attributed any part of their misfortunes to his father's ill judgment. It was a natural topic of consolation that he was falling with his order. All country gentlemen were impoverished. Jack knew of some others besides his father who were practically insolvent. Poverty had become respectable. None the less, it was extremely depressing to be continually contemplating it, discussing it, and adjusting the comfortable routine of life to its requirements.

Expenditure at Huntsham had been cut down to starvation point.

The shooting had been let, and Jack

actually could not stroll with his dog through his own father's woods. The stables, where Lady Eugenia's ponies and a single carriage-horse were all that remained of the once plentiful equipage, filled Jack's soul with the blackest melancholy. Few things are to the horse-lover more depressing than an unused stable—silence and gloom where once all was pleasant bustle; the grass-grown yard, the empty stalls where gallant steeds have stood; the loose-box where the favourite hunter has reposed in well-earned dignity after the labours of the chase, or a pet pony has awaited his morning treat of carrots and lumps of sugar. There were many such stalls now in the Huntsham stables, and Jack, poor lad, had indulged in many a day-dream of how, some day or other, he would fill them worthily with steeds who should carry him as a Heriot M.F.H. ought, in the proper order of things, to be carried. Vain dreams! Vain hopes,

which the rude hand of reality had swept away.

Jack shunned the scene of desolation.

Indoors the dingy process of retrenchment was equally apparent. The long file of serving men and women who used to come, trooping, in imposing procession, into the hall for morning prayers, had dwindled to a little group—servants who were necessary to Lady Eugenia's comfort, or who had grown gray in Sir Adrian's service, and could not now, without actual cruelty, be turned out upon the world. Jack used to sit at prayers, looking out on the acres which were passing away from him—the lawn, each corner of it with its own special association—the dear old trees that he had played under as a child—and groaned inwardly at the thought that all was, so far as he was concerned, a vanishing phantom. They were solid facts no more; they were a reminiscence, a regret. 'Fuimus,' he would say bitterly to himself;

'the Heriots have had their day. I am the last of them.'

Meanwhile his father and mother were feeling hopelessly perplexed. They agreed that nothing could be worse for Jack than dawdling about at home, nursing his fancies and his mishaps, practising upon his violin, writing small pieces of poetry, sketching in the park, or paying visits at neighbouring houses, where he was extremely popular. The revelation of his real position had been a great shock to him, no doubt, which might well make action for the moment impossible. But it was now necessary that Jack should set to work. He himself was anxious to be gone. His parents shared his anxiety, with the super-added motive of wishing him to be well away before Olivia returned to her home, to give rise, perhaps, to some new complication. It was easy enough to see that Jack ought to go. The difficulty was to settle the 'where' and the 'how.' Upon

these points the family consultations threw no ray of light. Jack took a humble view of his capacities, and suggested a ranche in Montana where one of his college friends had been for a year or two horse-breaking and cattle-driving. ‘That is the only sort of work I am fit for, father, and which I could do decently well; I should like it, I fancy.’ The prospect filled Lady Eugenia with horror. She pictured to herself a hideous vision of Jack as a cowboy, careering about on a buck-jumping mustang, swearing strange oaths and bearded like the pard. Sir Adrian liked the project scarcely better than did his wife. It was bad enough for Huntsham to pass to other hands, for their old life to be broken up, but Jack in the wilds of West America, far from kith and kin, living the rowdy life of a cattle-ranche! It did not, Sir Adrian admitted, fall within the limits of the endurable.

Lady Eugenia settled the matter by im-

ploring Jack, with tears in her eyes, not to desert her. 'I have gone through a great deal,' she said, 'but this would be more than I could bear. Your father and I are old people. Do not darken the few years that remain to us by leaving us alone. Jack, dear, I beg and pray you not to leave me.'

Jack kissed his mother, and swore that he never would, and told his father that evening that the Montana project might be considered as abandoned. The next day he came down to breakfast with a new suggestion. He would go to London and study art. He knew an artist, Brandon, an old college friend, who was doing capitally, and would let him share his studio. 'I have a taste for water-colours, as you have often said, mother; I could learn to paint as well as some of the fellows who exhibit. Why should I not? At all events, it could do no harm to try. I have given up Montana to please you, mother; now you must back up this plan to please me.'

Lady Eugenia found it difficult to meet this argument ; and, indeed, on several accounts the project pleased her. It committed them to nothing ; it put an end to all schemes which involved Jack's expatriation ; it involved no outlay of capital ; it would give Jack the sort of life he liked, and an honourable occupation. All hesitation, however, was brought to a speedy close by a letter which arrived from Mr. Hillyard, announcing that Olivia had actually arrived at the Rectory.

Jack was agreeably surprised at the alacrity with which his father embraced his latest scheme. Before the week was over he was established in Brandon's quarters in Chelsea, had enrolled himself in an art class, purchased a magnificent supply of artist's paraphernalia, and, under his friend's superintendence, had set to work with real enthusiasm at the first stage of his new profession.

His presence in London was highly unwelcome to the Valentines. His uncle had been thoroughly annoyed by the summary rejection of his offer. A general feeling of contempt had ripened into active dislike. Valentine had made up his mind that Jack was a fool—quixotic, romantic, erratic, faddish—everything that a reasonable being, who means to get on in the world, ought not to be. He let Jack at once understand the low valuation which he put upon him and his opinions. Jack saw that his uncle was intending to belittle him, and at once stood to his arms. Valentine dropped a sneer at Sir Adrian which called the colour to Jack's cheeks and set his pulse throbbing. His rejoinder was more explicit than polite. Jack being in a quarrelsome mood, his uncle was by no means disinclined to quarrel. Isabella added the necessary drop of acid. The two men parted coldly, and with no invitation, as Jack had expected,

to exercise the privileges of a kinsman in coming when he pleased to see them.

Mrs. Valentine had, just now, a special reason for disliking him. He was in her way ; he might prove a formidable obstacle. If he established a footing at his grandmother's he would be likely to spoil everything. It was essential, Isabella Heriot felt, that no other influence than her own should be brought to bear, just now, on the invalid's mind. It was essential that there should be no independent observer, no independent reporter of what was going on. Sir Adrian had no idea of his mother's condition. It was necessary to keep Jack also in the dark, to keep him from Lady Heriot, who had doted on him as a child, as she had doted on his father before him, who, however angry she might at times feel with Sir Adrian, was always hankering after him and longing for reconciliation,—who might easily be reconciled, and so spoil all Mrs.

Valentine's designs. It had become necessary to prejudice Lady Heriot against her grandson; nor had this been difficult to achieve. For Lady Heriot had heard much about Jack of which she vehemently disapproved. It was easy to turn this prejudice to good account.

Before he had been many weeks in London Jack had managed so to play his game as to lead up to his adversary's strongest card. He had speedily renewed his intercourse with the Shoreditch parson, who was only too grateful for an enthusiastic co-operator. Jack brought new fire, new zeal, new hope to his companion's projects of reformation. Day after day he was horrified by discoveries of misery—hopeless toil, destitute homes, abysmal depths of depravity—the hell upon earth which is realised in the low life of great cities. He was horrified, perturbed, and excited more than he was aware. He made friends with

many men as excited as himself. He attended meetings where everything helped to foster excitement, where passion was in the air, where inflammatory speeches—instinct with anger, impatience, jealousy, revenge—stirred a sympathetic audience almost past quiet endurance; where the view of the rich as the oppressors of the poor, as thoughtless unpitying monopolists of all the good things of life, was assumed, as a matter of course, by speakers and hearers alike. He heard passionate men declaiming against wrongs inflicted by the powerful on the weak—laws passed by the wealthy to enhance their unjust privileges—order, the mere systematising of oppression—religion, no longer the refuge of the wretched, but the bulwark of inhuman inequalities of lot. He lived among men who were profoundly convinced that a society, contrived in the interests of the privileged few, must be shaken to its very foundations before the

poor could enjoy their natural rights. He began to share their beliefs and their aspirations.

Then came a period of distress. Trade was slack; several great industries were paralysed; large numbers were out of work. There were gatherings of hungry men, stung by cruel scenes of misery at home. Jack was in the midst, as excited as any one. He found himself surrounded by numbers of poor people whose inarticulate misery craved bitterly for expression. None of his relations sympathised in the least with him, or could understand his feelings. He thought of his quiet comfortable home, where the distant murmur of the City mob sounded so faintly; of his father's calm explanations; of Hillyard's apologies; his mother's narrow sympathies, foolish fears, and equally foolish courage; of his uncle's keen, hard selfishness, always ready to turn each new circumstance to his own profit; of

Isabella Heriot, luxurious, pleasure-seeking, profuse in personal expenditure, niggardly in all other.

He thought of them bitterly, contemptuously. Were these the people who constituted society? and if so, was society worth the trouble of preserving it? Then, as bad luck would have it, there was a collision with authority. Jack one day found himself in the midst of a great open-air meeting, which the law forbade. The law forbid it! The law forbid starving men—with wives and children starving at home—if indeed their dens could be called a home—to meet and tell their tale of woe, hopelessness, unrequited toil, bootless search for work! The law maintain order, so that the rich might go on in cynical enjoyment of their luxuries, while the masses, driven back by main force, toiled, suffered, perished without a helper, without even an utterance of despair! There was a scuffle close to

where Jack was standing, a sudden rush of policemen who were pushing their way through the mob and using fists and truncheons freely. The people were shoving, pushing, kicking, shouting. ‘Move on! move on!’ The truncheons seemed descending everywhere on the shoulders and heads of defenceless people. ‘Move on be damned!’ cried a tatterdemalion lad who stood at Jack’s side, the very embodiment of misery. Crash came a truncheon, the boy was lying at Jack’s feet in a pool of blood. ‘You ruffian,’ cried Jack, beside himself with fury, ‘don’t touch that boy again.’

‘Stand off!’ cried the policeman, but Jack was in no temper to stand off, and stood defiant over the prostrate victim of the law. Then some one struck the policeman; a free fight began. Jack unluckily knew how to use his fists, and fought like a young Trojan. ‘Stand back!’ the police-

man cried, pushing Jack roughly back. Then Jack's stalwart arm flashed out, and the mob shouted with triumph to see the vindicator of order knocked head over heels and rolling in the dirt. Short-lived triumph, alas! for the prostrate warrior was soon on his legs again. Other policemen were closing in. Jack suddenly felt a crushing blow, given by an unseen hand, which brought him to his knees, sick, giddy, almost stunned. Before he could collect his senses he found himself powerless, with his arms fastened behind him, in the firm grip of two sturdy constables, who were marching him through the frightened, surly crowd to the nearest Station, where he was left for the rest of the day to reflect at leisure on the results of his first active attempt to assist the democracy.

The next morning, with a black eye, torn clothes, and broken head, Jack appeared among a grimy crowd of fellow-offenders,

and received the righteous reward of his indiscreet valour in an award of a week's imprisonment, accompanied by several caustic observations from the presiding magistrate as to the foolish criminality of young gentlemen who amuse themselves by attending mob-meetings and assist in resisting the police.

Mrs. Heriot, when she came down to breakfast next morning, found her husband in no pleasant mood, reading the *Times*, with many fervent exclamations of anger and disgust. He handed the paper to her with sundry half-smothered utterances, more fervent than polite, and strode about the room in a fury.

'The young idiot might have had the decency to conceal his name, and not disgrace us all by his blackguardism and folly. It is intolerable.'

'It is admirable,' cried Mrs. Heriot as she finished the perusal and proceeded to make tea. 'I am delighted!'

'Delighted?' cried her husband. 'And why, pray?'

'Why?' said his wife; 'because I like to see ragamuffins and ragamuffins' champions in their proper place.'

This, however, was not the real cause of Mrs. Valentine's delight. Immediately after breakfast she hurried off to Lady Heriot's with the agreeable intelligence that her grandson was in jail.

Mrs. Valentine, in her eagerness to tell her tale, forgot for the moment the necessity, urged so strongly by Mr. Battiscombe, the doctor, of keeping the invalid from sudden shock. She forgot to watch the effect of her communication on its recipient. Lady Heriot, however, showed no outward symptom of excitement. As Isabella's description drew to a close she sat quietly looking at her with a puzzled inquiring look, as if no clear impression had reached the brain. She closed her eyes and sank back

with a gesture of weariness. The rumours of life were beginning to sound faintly in her ear, like the dull murmur of waves upon a distant shore. The clouds were gathering around ; all was confusion in her mind. She heard the story indeed, but heard as in a dream, where nothing is consequential. She was too feeble to be indignant, to understand the grounds of indignation. Mrs. Valentine saw quickly that her mother-in-law was not herself. How much of the story had she understood ? How much was it possible to make her understand ? Had the opportunity for which Isabella had been so long watching, preparing, already passed away ?

When Lady Heriot at last spoke it was clear that her brain was no longer duly performing its task. She had understood nothing aright. In particular she was, as Isabella found, mixing up Jack's present trouble with his father's previous misadventure.

'In jail,' she said; 'Adrian in jail! I was afraid that it would be so, that it would come to this. It was in vain to help him. I did what I could—more than I ought. It was in vain, in vain! And now he is in jail! I am tired, tired! Isabella, are you there?'

'Mother,' said the other, 'you are overdone; keep quiet awhile and rest yourself. There is nothing to worry about. It is not Adrian who is in trouble, but his boy, Jack; it is only a boy's scrape.'

'Where is Adrian?' cried Lady Heriot. 'Why does he not come to see me? Why does he not write? He always used to write to me on Sundays. He knows how ill I am. I am dying, Isabella; dying fast. I want to see him again—to see him again, my poor boy Adrian. You wrote, Isabella, did you not?'

'Of course,' said Mrs. Valentine. 'I wrote the day you told me to do so.'

‘Well,’ said the other, ‘write again and tell him that I am grieved. He does not write or come to me because he is ashamed. I am ashamed too; but tell him to come. I want him badly. I must see him again.’

It was true that Mrs. Valentine had written, as she said. None the less, her answer to her mother was a lie. Her letter to Sir Adrian had been carefully framed so as to avoid giving him any intimation of his mother’s state or of her wish to see him. On the contrary, it contained various hints which Sir Adrian felt to be excessively offensive. It was written from his mother’s room; it professed to be by her inspiration; but it sounded no note of tenderness, affection—the mother’s natural yearnings for her first-born. It dealt with some business matters—drily, harshly, even, as it seemed to Sir Adrian’s sensitive nerves, discourteously. It suggested no overtures of peace; rather, it breathed a subtle undertone of hostility. Mrs. Valen-

tine's conscience, which was never encouraged to morbid delicacy or inconvenient outspokenness, had stung her as she wrote. It was necessary, however, at any cost, to keep Sir Adrian away. It was essential to Mrs. Valentine's project. As, moreover, a visit from Sir Adrian just now might really do his mother harm, it was but carrying out the doctor's orders to guard effectually against his coming.

One base act involves another. Lady Heriot's messages to her son being falsified, it was necessary that his letters to her should be suppressed, and that the suppression should be covered by a direct falsehood. Such falsehoods are often told to invalids, whom it is necessary, for their own sakes, to mislead. If justified on this ground, the fact that they are, on other grounds, expedient, cannot render them unjustifiable. So whispered the impish spirit that sat just now, toad-like, whispering evil counsels into Mrs.

Valentine's too attentive ear, and suffusing her soul with ever-blackening shades of turpitude. Wrongdoing is like some mountain's icy glissade ; he who is rash enough to venture on it may have to travel farther than he likes. Mrs. Valentine was on the slope ; achievement by whatever means was indispensable. She now took the precaution of giving orders that, should Sir Adrian or his son happen to call, neither of them was, on any account, to be admitted. Nothing was to be said of Lady Heriot's condition except that she had given orders not to be disturbed.

END OF VOL. I



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